MISTAKEN PATHS

HERBERT G. DICK

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A NOVEL.

BY

HERBERT G. DICK.

pseud

Carrie A. Morgan

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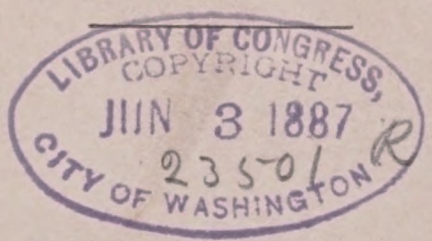

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MISTAKEN PATHS.

CHAPTER I.

THIS is a story from life that I am about to relate to you, therefore, in order that you may not be led by me to trace the real actors in it, I will call the small Western city where it had its beginning, Newbridge, instead of by its true name.

It is a manufacturing city, having many shops, foundries, and factories, sending forth thick clouds of smoke and soot, that leave their grimy traces wherever they fall.

In an attractive little frame cottage, situated in a pleasant portion of the city, just far enough removed from the great shops to escape their noise and much of their dirt, lived John Patton, a skilled mechanic, and his family, consisting of his wife and two daughters. This house, together with a snug sum of savings, had been bequeathed to him by his father at his death, some years before my story opens, and he had immediately moved to Newbridge from an eastern city, to take up his abode in it. On account of his having this home, the savings, and a place among the highest-paid workmen in the shops, he was looked up to with

envy and much show of respect by his fellow-workers, and was thought particularly favored by Providence because his daughters were two of the loveliest girls to be seen for miles around.

Irene, the older, at the beginning of my story just past fifteen, was tall, well formed, fair as a summer day, with large blue eyes full of changing expression, hair of a light golden color, hanging always in a cluster of curls about her shoulders almost to her waist, full red lips, a perfect mouth, and small round dimples that came and went in her cheeks whenever she smiled.

June, who was ten years younger than Irene, was so opposite in appearance that, had you not known, you would never have believed they were sisters, even when seeing them together. She too was beautiful, but her hair was black, her eyes brown, and her complexion dark.

There was, however, one drawback or hinderance to John Patton's enjoyment of these blessings, for even with the society of his children, his home, comfortably furnished as it was and containing many luxuries which his fellow-workmen did not possess and could never afford, was not a happy one. His wife, who had been his helpmeet for years, economizing and saving with him all the while, had grown so exacting in every way as to make home-life ofttimes unbearable. There seemed always to be turmoil and wrangling there. She would not permit the comforts they possessed to be enjoyed; for instance, the parlor was not used, except when company was present, lest the carpet should become worn and faded; the piano was rarely opened lest dust should get inside; a new dress must not be

worn to school by either of the girls so long as they had an older one to wear.

Mrs. Patton never meant to be cruel, though unconsciously she became so. Seeing the condition of the families of those about her whose incomes were almost equal to her husband's, who spent all they had, without any calculation for the future, taking what pleasure and pain such method brought as a matter of course, she wished her own condition and that of her family to be better, and their future more secure and promising. Moreover, she was an ignorant woman, and fond of making the greatest display with the least possible expenditure.

Though they had the piano, none of the family could play upon it, save Irene, who could only drum out a few airs, caught up from the street, the church, or the house of a friend. Once, when the instrument had first been purchased, she had revelled in the luxury of a music-teacher for two successive terms, and her progress had been so rapid, and the music and tuition so expensive, that Mrs. Patton decided that there had been sufficient instruction and expense for the time, and the lessons were stopped, and had never since been renewed.

Then, though Mrs. Patton's health was poor, and there was quite a large amount of work to be done about the house, with the mending and making of clothes for the family, washing, ironing, baking, cooking, and other homely duties of the household, and servant hire was very low in Newbridge, she persistently performed all these duties herself, with no assistance save what she could secure, from time to time, from Irene. Once Irene had returned from school on a

biting cold day in winter, and finding her mother hard at work over the wash-tub, said,—

"Why do you wash the clothes on such cold days, mother? Mrs. Carson hires a woman to do her washing for only fifty cents."

"The Carsons haven't a thing they can call their own. I do my own washing to keep my children out of the poor-house!" Mrs. Patton answered in a sharp tone.

It was always the way, hard work and hard words; no poetry in such a life, no pleasure, no advancement; each hope of something better in the future that sprung up in Irene's breast died in embryo. Something was added to the savings each month, but something was lost from her hopeful anticipations, looking forward to an end of this dull commonplace life, an end of economizing and hard work, when the savings, the home, and its belongings were to be enjoyed, and

"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

June was never permitted to play "catch" and "hide-and-seek" with children of her own age, because running wore out her shoes; and her dresses and clean aprons got soiled when she played at keeping house and baked mud pies in the sun, and washing them so much wore them out sooner. She never had known the luxury of a china or wax doll,—they were too easily broken; but every Christmas-time Santa Claus brought her a rag baby with a round face and flat head, with eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth marked on its muslin face in ink, and having arms without hands and feet without toes.

When the delusion about Santa Claus was removed by wiser playmates, Christmas brought only some articles of clothing for both girls, that would have been furnished just the same, and sometimes earlier, had there been no Christmas at all. To be sure, on that day they found nuts, raisins, and candies in their stockings, which they still continued to hang up each year for the sake of these very sweets, which never came at any other time.

Both girls attended the public schools. June had just entered the primary, when Irene was finishing the grammar department.

John Patton and his wife had never received such advantages as were afforded by the excellent schools at Newbridge; Mrs. Patton had received instruction within the walls of a primitive country school-house, where pupils of ages ranging from five to twenty-one met in the same room to glean what knowledge they might from a school-master who exercised the rod quite as much as he did his brains,—perhaps more vigorously and with more intelligence,—and who secured a portion of his salary by boarding around in the homes of his pupils. She had been taken from school early in life and sent to learn dressmaking, that thereby she might be enabled to earn something towards her own support. This fact she was continually recounting to Irene, who did not take kindly to work, by saying,—

"When I was of your age I was earning my own living. I've never had the advantages that your father and me are giving to you."

John Patton had been apprenticed to a mechanic early in life, and the most of his knowledge was gleaned

from practical experience in the workshop. It was the intention of both parents to send the girls through the public schools that they might support themselves finally by teaching; yet Mrs. Patton was fond of saying to her husband,—

"It won't do no good, John, likely, as they probably will get married so soon as they're ready to teach, both of them, after wasting all these good years."

There was nothing to do, however, but to speculate on the years, so she consoled herself by saying,—

"Irene can't do nothing about the house any way, and won't learn, so I can't see as she's going to amount to anything except it's a teacher any way."

One beautiful May morning, the first day of the week, Irene was walking towards school in a most unhappy frame of mind. The last bell was ringing, and, although she had a half-mile to walk and there was a penalty imposed for being late, she seemed in no haste, but went slowly and hesitatingly onward.

Had you observed her closely you would have seen her draw forth her handkerchief at frequent intervals and wipe her eyes hastily, looking about as if to assure herself that she was unobserved. Had you been very near to her, you would have noticed her slight frame quivering with agitation, and have discovered that the tears were of anger, not of sorrow or distress.

There had been trouble and conflict at home that morning. Irene, like many young girls of her age, was excessively fond of reading novels. It had become almost a passion with her, for as she read of beautiful women having fortunes in their own right, with money to spend when they wished and as they

chose, with carriages to ride in, servants to wait upon them, dresses of silks, satins, and velvets, of all designs and colors, and living in beautiful homes, with conservatories filled with flowers, and grand parlors and drawing-rooms, that were always open, she would become so completely absorbed as to feel almost as if she were herself the heroine of whom she was reading, —experiencing the same luxuries, pleasures, and comforts.

On the Friday before she had obtained from a classmate a most fascinating novel. Almost every girl in her class had read and talked of it until Irene was almost burning with a desire to peruse it. The girl who owned it had loaned it to her classmates in exchange for other books; but Irene had none to offer in exchange. They had few books at home, only one of which she had ever cared to read. That one had been sent by an aunt as a Christmas present to her mother a long time before, and was a copy of Byron's poems, a large book bound in bright green cloth with staring gold letters on its cover. She had seen it lying on the centre-table in the parlor for so long a time, by the side of the tall lamp that always stood there, that she had come to recognize it as a fixture, and would as soon have thought of overturning the table as to have moved it from its place.

One Sunday afternoon her mother had brought it out into the room where the whole family were sitting, and had read aloud from it in a melancholy tone of voice those expressive lines "To Tom Moore." Irene was so charmed by the sentiment that many times afterwards she longed to read from its pages, and on return-

ing from school one day and finding no one at home, she had gone into the parlor, taken it up, and finding in it other poems as sweet, musical, and interesting, became so deeply engrossed that unthinkingly she curled her feet, with their dirty shoes, up under her on the best hair-cloth sofa, becoming unconscious of everything save what she was reading, when the door of the parlor suddenly opened with a quick nervous jerk and her mother entered. Starting up in terror, she let the book fall to the floor, face downward, open at the place where she had been reading, which was marked at the bottom of each leaf on the white margin by black spots where her thumbs and fingers had been. She was given several sharp raps on the head, and was sent to bed supperless. Such had been her experience with the only book they had at home worth reading, and as she dared not for a moment think of lending that, she racked her brain in vain to devise some other means for procuring the coveted novel.

On the Friday before, however, Alice Jackson, the owner of the book, had, of her own accord, offered to loan it to her until Monday, if she would, in return, assist her a little in the written examination which was always given to them on that day, and Irene had joyfully consented.

As her mother had forbidden her to borrow novels or any such "trash," as she called them, Irene kept this one hidden from her sight, retiring early on Friday to begin its perusal in bed. She read late that night. All day Saturday, being obliged to assist about the housework, she was unable to steal a moment away, but at night, on retiring, she read again from its pages, and

stole to her room on Sunday after church and Sunday-school, and read Sunday night until the oil gave out in the lamp, yet when Monday morning came she had neither finished the novel nor studied her lessons for the day.

On Mondays as it was Mrs. Patton's custom to arise at a very early hour, sometimes before daylight, to begin the week's washing, she always called Irene earlier, to prepare the morning meal, and on this morning, all the while she was at work, Irene was seeking to devise some excuse whereby she might get an opportunity to finish the book. Finally she hit upon one she thought would serve her purpose.

When breakfast was ready, and her mother had come in wiping her wet arms and hands on her apron, and had taken her accustomed seat behind the coffee-pot, Irene, appearing to be seized with a sudden spasm, gave a heavy groan, and, placing her hand over her stomach, said, in a tone which seemed full of agony,—

"Oh, dear! I have such a pain right here!"

"Drink some hot coffee and you will feel better," said her mother.

"Oh, dear! no, I couldn't eat or drink a thing! I'll just run up-stairs and lie down a little while, and maybe the pain will go away before school-time."

"All right," answered her mother. "I'll call you in time for school." And Irene went out of the room with agony depicted in every line of her countenance.

As soon as the door was closed between her and the family she hastened to her room, drew the book from under the mattress, threw herself upon the bed, and was soon engrossed in the closing chapters of the story.

So deeply was she absorbed that she did not hear a slow firm step mount the stairs and carefully cross the hall to the door of her room, but she did hear her name spoken in a sharp high tone, and springing up, saw her mother standing beside her bed with a bowl of steaming herb tea in her hands and her eyes fastened upon the book.

"What have you there?" inquired Mrs. Patton, as she put out her hand to grasp it.

"You must not take it! it is not mine, and I must return it this morning!" entreated Irene.

"You borrowed it, after my having forbidden you to borrow books?" exclaimed her mother. "And you have lied to me about being sick, and left me slaving at my work for you while you lay around like a fine lady and read such trash and worthless nonsense as that! Give it here to me! I'll teach you not to disobey me! I'll warrant you won't borrow any more books soon again! Give it here!" she shouted, as she snatched the book from Irene, and turned to leave the room.

"Oh, mother! mother! what are you going to do with it? Oh, mother! let me have it! I promised to return it to-day! Oh, please,—what are you going to do with it?" she cried, tears flooding her eyes as she followed her mother down the stairs clinging to her skirts, as if to hold her back. Mrs. Patton seemed not to hear, as with a firm iron tread that seemed to shake the whole house she passed through the hall and sitting-room into the kitchen, Irene following close at her heels still holding fast to her dress crying and begging her to listen.

"Oh, mother, hear me! forgive me! I'll never, never

do so again! I'll never read another story as long as I live if you'll only give this back!"

Mrs. Patton, unheeding, passed on to the stove. A large boiler filled with clothes was sending hot steam throughout the house as the clothes boiled up with the suds. With one hand she lifted it aside,—there were no covers on the stove underneath, and the coals were burning brightly.

"Mother!" shrieked Irene in terror, as she now divined her mother's purpose; but it was too late. The book had been dropped on the burning coals, and the boiler of clothes set back over it.

Mrs. Patton, turning towards Irene to add a word of admonition for the future, was startled at the look that met hers. Irene, whose eyes seemed almost starting from her sockets, shrieked,—

"I hate you! Oh, how I hate you!" So loud she shouted that her voice grated in her throat, as if she could not express her hatred with so feeble an organ; then springing upon her mother, she tried to push her against the wall, the stove, anything, she cared not what, anything to show her contempt.

She might as easily have moved the house as to have moved that tall, strong, muscular woman. Her fruitless efforts only added to her fury, and in the intensity of her anguish she fixed her teeth in the wrist of the hand put out to ward her off, fixed them in it deep, fiercely, and revengefully; then, seizing her hat, rushed out into the street, quivering like a reed in the wind from the intense strain upon her slight frame. So now, though the sun was shining and the birds were singing, and all nature seemed beautiful and bright,

she was walking along the street, wretched, revengeful, and unhappy, not having one feeling of repentance or remorse, only hardening her heart against her mother more and more each moment.

"If father had only been there, he might have saved it for me," she said to herself, feeling that, though he had long ago surrendered his right to direct and dictate in home affairs, he might have interceded in her behalf on this occasion and turned her mother from her purpose. When she tried to think what she should say to Alice Jackson, the owner of the book, she cried anew and wrung her hands in despair. It would never do to tell her that her mother had burned it, and she had no means of replacing it. She never had any money of her own; even the necessities of school, such as pens, ink, and paper, were only furnished to her after much importuning on her part and a note from the teacher finally, urging the necessity of them.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she said to herself, vainly seeking to decide what present course to pursue. The last bell was ringing for school. Frank Raynor, who was driving past, saw her standing there, noted her distress, and thinking it might be occasioned by the knowledge that she would be late, drew up his horse near the sidewalk, saying,—

"If you will jump in beside me, Irene, I will take you to school. I am going that way, and you will be late if you walk."

Irene started back, and replied, sharply,—

"I don't want you to take me. I don't care if I am late. I don't intend to go to school ev—er." The

last word was separated by a sob, and she began crying as if her heart was breaking.

Frank Raynor leaped from his carriage and went towards her.

"What troubles you, Irene?" he asked, gently. At the sound of his voice her grief grew more intense, and the sobs that burst forth shook her very frame. She could not have answered him if she had wished; besides, she saw a woman across the way standing in the door-way of her house staring at her, and another woman crossing the street and coming towards her; so she put out her hands, and, impatiently pushing him aside, ran as fast as her feet could carry her down the street and up another, until she was quite out of sight of all of them.

When she was out of breath she stopped running, and walked slowly towards the outskirts of the city. Her thoughts were sorely troubled as she attempted to map out some course for the future that would not necessitate her returning home again.

"I cannot go back to school again without the book,—the girls will all look on me with suspicion and distrust, and I can never tell them what became of it," she said in distress, again and again, and lingered all the morning in and about the woods that skirted that part of the town to which she had walked, revolving and weighing many wild plans in her thoughts, only to cast them aside in the end as impracticable, her imagination all the while being more active than her reasoning powers.

"At any rate," she said at length, "one thing is certain; I will never go back home if I have to starve on

the streets." She was anxious to convey to her mother this decision, thinking that it might stir up some pangs of remorse in her breast, so, when it was near noon, she retraced her steps to await June's return from school on a corner the child was certain to pass, in order to send a message home by her. She had not waited long before June, whose class was always dismissed a half-hour earlier than the higher grades, was seen approaching in the midst of a small bevy of school-children.

"June! June!" Irene called out to her from across the street. June, turning towards her in surprise, left her mates and came running across to where she was standing. When she saw the traces of tears on her sister's face, she besought her to tell what troubled her, and Irene willingly confided to her the whole story of her distress, saying when she had concluded,—

"Now, June, I want you to put my best dress and hat in the woodshed, in the corner back of the wood-pile, so I can slip in by the alleyway and find them easily, for I am going away and am never coming back any more."

June did not quite comprehend.

"Are you going far away—all alone—and nev—er coming back ev—er any more?" she questioned, with a long-drawn emphasis on the words "ever" and "never."

"Yes, I am going where I won't have to wipe dishes, and be treated worse than a dog, without ever being allowed to read or have any pleasure. Run home and tell that to mother—maybe she'll wish she hadn't burned the book—and meet me here as you go to school, and let me know what she says."

But June lingered.

"Where'bouts are you going?" she inquired.

"Oh, I don't know; that is, I can't tell just yet; but if you're real good, and put the dress and hat where I have said, and tell mother I am going to go away off, and am never coming back, and meet me here again on your way to school, I'll tell you all about it. Now make haste."

June needed no further urging, but ran with all her might homeward. Pretty little June! she had such a plump little figure, and her face was like a sunbeam all the time. Nothing ever worried her. She had large eyes like Irene, but they were brighter and full of mischief and merriment, her eyelashes were long and sweeping, and her lips were full, pouting, and very red. Two sisters are seldom seen so entirely unlike each other in appearance and manners. Nothing that June ever wore detracted from her beauty; everything that Irene put on seemed unbecoming. June came and went to school with a crowd of children about her, of which she was the acknowledged leader; Irene went to and fro alone. Nothing troubled June; everything troubled Irene. Irene was always thinking and dreaming; June scarcely thought at all. June would laugh over a cut in her finger and run to have her mother tie it up, laughing sometimes with tears in her eyes, while Irene would complain for hours over a scratch not nearly so severe. Irene was always full of cares; June had never a care in the world. June was like a diamond,—no matter how plain the setting, retaining its lustre and brilliancy just the same; while Irene, like a pearl, required a fine setting, and suitable light to set forth its beauty. June was generous; Irene was selfish. June never thought of advancing in school, while Irene was

an earnest student, ambitious to progress rapidly in all her studies.

Many of her classmates envied her success, and oft-times besought her to assist them; but she never consented to do so unless such assistance was paid for in some way; and as envy breeds hatred, her classmates grew to dislike her. They never avoided her, but simply, as if by common consent, let her alone.

Irene was a dreamer; she loved to read and paint, having a talent for painting remarkable in one so young. She liked to walk through the woods, to gather wild flowers, and to be alone, always thinking, and making plans for her future. Every new book or story she read started a new train of thought in her mind; for she always believed that what she read might happen to her in reality, as it had happened to others in fiction. Life, to her imaginative mind, was full of romances such as she read about, and she was at present figuring as one of the poor unfortunates in one of them.

To-day with its troubles might be the turning-point in her life, so she reasoned. Where she was to go or how to continue, however, were perplexing questions constantly recurring to her. They disturbed her more than ever as she awaited June's return, because she felt the need of carrying out her intention of going away, having sent such word to her mother. But, as she had no money, she realized that she would be obliged to walk and beg as she went along until she was out of Newbridge, and thus be no better than a common beggar, and the thought annoyed her. If she could only get into a railway-car and be quickly carried

away to a distant city, no doubt she would experience little difficulty in securing a position as governess in some rich man's family, she thought, never once pausing to consider that there might not be any such position awaiting her, or that she was too young and inexperienced to fill it; she only realized now that the lack of funds was a very serious impediment to start out with. Her head ached and she was hungry, having sacrificed her breakfast that she might read the ill-fated novel.

Where was she to procure her dinner to-day? where to-morrow? were questions continually presenting themselves, and she grew impatient as she recognized how utterly helpless was her situation. The shop-whistles were signalling the hour of noon. The men going home from their work, they poured out of the shops like huge black clouds, separating and spreading about in every direction until, becoming more and more scattered, they finally disappeared. Several passed her whom she knew, and nodded cheerily to her. She was vexed at their recognition, so she turned aside to avoid them.

"Irene! Irene!" a musical voice called out to her, and she heard footsteps behind hurrying to overtake her. At another time, in lighter trouble, the voice would have been refreshing and most welcome, and she would have stopped instantly and turned with relief to greet her only intimate friend, Minnie Barnes. Now it jarred on her, because it was so sweet, and seemed so happy, while she herself was so miserable. She hurried on, not seeming to hear, anxious to put herself out of reach of sympathy, lest she be influenced

from her determination to quit home, friends, and Newbridge.

"Irene! Irene! wait a moment!" She was obliged to stop and turn, there was no other way; the voice was so near it was impossible to pretend not to have heard it. The face that greeted hers was wreathed in smiles, as she knew it was certain to be before ever she looked.

"What is the matter, dear? You have been crying; and you were not at school this morning!" said this sweet-voiced friend.

"No, I was not at school: I—was ill." Irene's lips framed the lie unconsciously.

"What was the matter? You don't look well, either," added Minnie, sympathetically, still smiling.

"Do you expect me to look well when I am sick?" Irene answered, impatiently, vexed at the undercurrent of doubt which Minnie's answer and manner betrayed, and which she had frequently noted before in her conversation, the only trait which she disliked in her.

"Oh, no, to be sure not!" answered Minnie, in the politest manner, and with the softest inflection imaginable; "but you are walking away from home."

"Yes, I am aware of that; I am going on an errand," was the reply. Minnie waited a moment, expecting to be invited to accompany her, and no such invitation being extended, added,—

"I ought not to have stopped you, perhaps, only I wanted to ask if you were intending to go to the church social on Friday night. Mamma will not permit me to go alone, and I thought you and I could go together, and have brother Willie call for us, so we

would not have to come home without an escort,—that is, if you care to go."

"I had forgotten all about it; of course I will go," answered Irene, quickly. "Just think, it will be the best social of the year! The union of the young folks of the four churches!"

"Yes, I know it will be very pleasant,—what will you wear?" The question brought Irene's thoughts back to the present and immediate prospective condition of her affairs, and she answered despondently, with a sigh,—

"I don't know. I will tell you later on in the week."

"You are not well, I am sure you are not, for you don't act a bit like yourself. Do you know, I think you are just a lit—tle bit inclined to be cross, too. I must leave you now, or I will not have time to eat my luncheon before going to school again. Will you be at school this afternoon?"

"No."

"Well, good-by, then: I'll stop in on my way home this evening to see whether you are any better," and with a parting smile and a graceful little bow Minnie pursued her way homeward, leaving Irene, notwithstanding her petulance, in a lighter mood than she had been in before; the rosy cheeks, pretty dress, soft eyes, gentle voice, smiling face, and pleasant manners of her friend having had the effect of a stray sunbeam peeping into a damp, barren enclosure, brightening and cheering up the sad, lonesome spot on which it falls. So do some natures act upon others; so might one lighten the burden of another, if they would; if

they could only be true, if the help were honest help; but the one whose countenance is always wreathed in smiles is never to be trusted. I have learned that the smile is worn but as a mask to conceal the workings of the soul behind it. It leads into pleasant paths and betrays; it lifts a light burden only to cast on a heavier; it is no solace at the time of mourning, and brings no cheer at feasting; it covers always self-interest, deceit, and treachery. Why should a face be always smiling —every life has its sorrows—if the smile be not worn to conceal what lies beneath?

June was already waiting for Irene when she came back again to the place appointed for meeting, excited, vivacious, and happy. Irene saw that some new excitement was controlling her, and before she could speak June burst out,—

"Oh, Irene! Aunt Mollie's come all the way from New York! and she's brought me a great big wax doll with real hair, and eyes that shut and open, and shoes and stockings, and real little hats and bonnets; and, oh, she's come right on the cars, with a silk dress on; and she's brought something for you, too,—I don't know what: it's all done up so I couldn't see!" June paused to take breath.

"What are you saying? When did she come?" Irene asked, excitedly.

"This morning," answered June; "and mamma's got Julie Metzgar to come and finish the washing, and she's going to stay and be our hired girl while Aunt Mollie is here, and we had chicken and jelly for dinner, and the silver knives and forks; and how I wish you had been there!"

"What did mother say when you told her that I was never coming home again?" Irene inquired, feeling regret now because she had been so hasty in sending the message.

"Oh, Irene, I forgot to tell her!" replied June, in a regretful tone. "But now it won't make any difference; you'll have to go home to get what Aunt Mollie has brought for you,—I forgot about the dress and hat too."

"Oh, June, how could you?" said Irene, with a sigh of relief, however. "Did Aunt Mollie ask for me?"

"Yes; and mamma said you had gone to school and might not come home at noon-time."

"Well, run on to school then, June, or you will be late."

"And you will go home, Irene, and see what your present is?" queried June, anxiously.

"I'll be obliged to go now, since you did not get my things for me," answered Irene; and June ran away satisfied, while Irene, trying to make herself believe that she was compelled to relinquish her plans for the future on account of want of money as well as on account of June's negligence about executing her commission, but never once thinking that it was because of the social and Aunt Mollie's visit and the present she had brought, went back to her home, slipped in at the front door without being observed, ran quietly up to her room, donned her best gown, combed out her tangled curls, making herself as presentable as possible before she should come into the presence of her aunt, and stole quietly down-stairs in search of her.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Bostwick, or Aunt Mollie, as Irene and June, and in truth both Mr. and Mrs. Patton, called her, was a great personage in the estimation of the Patton family. She was Mrs. Patton's youngest and only living sister, at one time a woman of rare beauty. She had received a better education than her sister in her younger days, and was so pretty when a child even, that she was always winning hearts, gifts, and service from every one.

A great European artist, travelling through the States one summer, came upon her one day when she was but a child, playing with other children of her age on the outskirts of a wood. She had a wreath of flowers and running vines about her golden curls, and was giving orders with great animation to the children about her.

"Bring me more flowers," he heard her command. The flowers were proffered by half a dozen eager hands. She cast them aside in disdain, saying, "This blue will not do; I must have yellow." She was but seven then. This great artist made a sketch of her standing as he saw her there, which he afterwards copied and painted almost life-size, and sent to the Salon in Paris. It represented the children just as he had seen them, offering the flowers which were being rejected; the position and the expression of the central figure the same as it had been that day. He called the picture "A Queen," and its fame was world-wide.

Mrs. Bostwick's beauty had been her greatest attrac-

tion, and at the age of sixteen she married a man thirty years her senior, who had been captivated by it. He was a very wealthy broker, and took his bride to a palatial home in New York.

One child was born of this marriage, a son, who had been left to the nurse's care entirely until he was old enough to attend school, where he had been kept until his eighteenth year, when of his own accord he entered college and began reading law. All the while Mrs. Bostwick's life was spent in society, luxury, and idleness. She was the idol of her husband, who humored her slightest wish, ignoring her faults, seeing and seeming to realize only that she was beautiful. She loved to deck herself in becoming and rich attire and hear the murmur of admiration that always greeted her entry into a drawing-room. She loved also to read the praise of her beauty and dress in the society journals,—a thorough woman of the world, she was living for the world, not for home or domesticity.

Of late years, however, her beauty was fading. She was no longer young; the natural bloom was leaving her cheeks, and a few stray wrinkles had made their appearance in her face. Her health was failing, too, and her physician had advised a change,—less of late hours and society, and more of rest and quiet,—recommending a sojourn in Colorado for a while.

She was on her way thither when she stopped at Newbridge to pay a visit to her sister, preceding her husband on the journey for this purpose, and with no word to announce her coming.

Once before she had visited them. Irene remembered the occasion distinctly. She could never forget

the beautiful woman who came among them when June was born, who stayed three days only, but gave to her during that time numerous half-dollars with which to purchase sweetmeats. Anxious to see her again, yet dreading to approach her mother, she now listened at the door of the parlor, then at the door of the family sitting-room, and finding all quiet within, cautiously turned the knob and entered.

A delicate perfume pervaded the atmosphere. Some one was lying on the sofa at the farther end of the room, who turned and looked towards the door as it opened. Irene recognized her aunt's features the moment she saw the large blue eyes that were fixed upon her, yet was unable to articulate a syllable. The form on the sofa lifted itself, and a great cloud of laces and ribbons at the same time, saying,—

"Is this my little Irene?" in the most musical of voices, as she came towards her and entwined her arms about her, showering kisses upon her face as she did so. Then, stepping back a pace, she scrutinized her carefully from top to toe, adding,—

"Why, how you have grown!"

"Yes," murmured Irene, feeling it necessary that she should make some response, and not knowing what else to say.

"And your dress is too short entirely for a girl of your age! Let me see,—you are sixteen, are you not?"

"Fifteen last August," Irene answered.

"Dear me! and you grow prettier every year! You must take good care of yourself, and you will develop into a handsome woman in time."

The bundle of lace and ribbons fell back upon the

sofa again. The mass of golden hair was lying against the homely home-made cushion. Diamonds sparkled in the delicate ears and on the fingers of the dainty hand; and the eyes found something to interest them in Irene, on whom they were riveted. Sitting down in the nearest chair, Irene fell to wondering whether she would ever grow to be as beautiful as the woman lying there before her.

"Is your school over so early?" inquired her aunt.

"No; I came home early because—because—you were here. June told me," answered Irene.

"Dear me, how nice of you. Favette must show you how to arrange your hair; you must not wear it in that fashion, it is so unbecoming to you."

"Who is Favette?" inquired Irene, tremulously.

"Favette is my maid; she is up-stairs in my room; suppose we go up now and see what she can do with that mass of curls." And springing up at this new caprice she led the way, Irene following. They entered the spare-room, where part of the contents of a trunk were lying about on the chairs and bed,—gloves, hosiery, and handkerchiefs, all exceedingly delicate and fine, and quantities of them. Irene's eyes sparkled with admiration.

"Favette, see what you can do with this young lady's hair," said Mrs. Bostwick, to a young woman kneeling before an open trunk.

"Yes, madame. How would madame like it dressed?"

"Any way that will become her; as it is, it is hideous."

"Will Miss,—the young lady please sit here?" asked Favette, placing a chair before the mirror.

"Miss Irene, Favette; she is my niece," Mrs. Bostwick explained.

"And like you, madame, the same eyes; the same hair exactly, madame."

Mrs. Bostwick threw herself lazily into a chair where she might watch the progress of hair-dressing, and offer, occasionally, some slight suggestion, while Irene, looking in the mirror, saw her tumbled curling locks that had always hung free about her head, knowing no bond, save sometimes that of a ribbon which held them together in one mass at the back, gathered up on the top of her head where they were twisted about in a coiling, careless fashion, and pinned in place with stiff wire hair-pins; not a curl to be seen anywhere, save where the short locks turned above her forehead. She scarcely recognized herself when Favette had finished, so changed she appeared.

"Ah, now you look like quite a different person!" exclaimed her aunt. "Wear your hair always in that fashion; it is much more becoming to you than hanging about your neck. Then you should wear red; it suits you. I am sorry I brought you blue instead of red, so few fair people can wear red," she said, as if to herself, musing half aloud. "Favette," she continued, "hand me that large package from the bed. There, Irene, see, I have brought you this from the city." And tearing open the parcel she tossed a dress-pattern of dark blue silk into Irene's lap.

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Irene. "Is this for me? Is it really mine?" and her face brightened with a new light as a smile broke her features.

"Certainly it is for you; and there is plenty of it,

too. Have it made long enough for you. That dress you have on is much too short for one of your age."

"Oh, thank you ever so much; it is just what I have been wanting so long. How can I ever thank you enough!" and, in her impetuous way, she threw her arms about her aunt's neck and kissed her over and over again.

"There, there, Irene; don't disarrange my hair, or your own. I'll tell you, child, if you want to please me, wear your hair in that fashion and your dresses longer." She had been holding both of Irene's hands, one in each of her own, as she was talking, and, now glancing down towards them, she exclaimed, "Good heavens, child, do wash some of the dirt from your hands and clean your finger-nails!" Irene turned to leave the room. "Wash them right here; you need not go out of the room," added Mrs. Bostwick; and Irene did as she was told.

Poor little neglected hands, they were always so dirty. She noticed them now for the first time, and not being able to get the nails clean, took up a pair of scissors and was about to cut them off.

"Stop! don't do that!" exclaimed Mrs. Bostwick, who had been following every movement with watchful eye. "Come here. Do you see my fingers?" and she held out her small, white hands with their tapering fingers and long shining nails. "Let your nails grow to be like mine and keep them always clean. You have pretty little hands, but no one would ever have thought so a moment ago, they were so very dirty. Keep your hands clean, and take pains with your hair,

and when I return from Colorado I may take you back to New York with me."

"When will you return?" inquired Irene, eagerly.

"Oh, I cannot tell just now; but I will write and let you know before I do come, so you may be ready." All the while Mrs. Bostwick was talking, Irene was eying the dress wistfully and admiringly; when she had finished, she said, timidly,—

"Aunt Mollie, won't you please ask mother to make this dress up for me right away, and make it long? She will do it if you ask her."

"Your mother can't make that dress, child!"

"She makes all of my dresses," answered Irene.

"No wonder, then, there is no fit to them!" said her aunt, impulsively.

Just at that moment Mrs. Patton's voice was heard calling up the stairway, and Mrs. Bostwick arose and went down-stairs immediately, Irene following with the dress-pattern in her arms. When she was in her mother's presence, she noticed that her right wrist had a bandage about it, and a flush of shame overspread her face. Mrs. Patton, ignoring Irene's presence entirely, entered into a spirited conversation with Mrs. Bostwick. But Irene, not wishing her aunt to know of the morning's episode, determined to act as if nothing unusual had occurred, so, advancing towards her mother, she laid the silk in her lap, saying,—

"Look, mother, what Aunt Mollie has brought for me!" Mrs. Patton looked at the silk without deigning a glance even at Irene, and said,—

"Why, Mollie, how could you be so foolish as to spend your money in so expensive a dress for a child?"

"Foolish, do you say? Because I wanted to bring her something, and I thought that would please her best. I do not think I have been foolish; and you should not call her a child, Sarah,—she is a young woman now. I was married at her age. You dress her like a child, but that does not keep her one; she should never wear her clothes like that were she my daughter," Mrs. Bostwick answered, with much spirit.

"Well, Mollie, you are not poor like we are; you can afford to carry out your whims; your husband is a rich man."

"Oh, don't go all over that again. I guess John Patton is not so poor but that he can afford to dress his family respectably, at least."

"Why, Mollie, what are you talking about?"

"I am talking about a girl, almost sixteen, going about with dresses that scarcely cover her ankles; that is what I am talking about. It is a shame and disgrace, nothing less!" Mrs. Bostwick was waxing warm, and Irene was enjoying the contest. It was a gratification for her to know that some one, recognizing her mother's failings, dared to oppose and reproach her in so vehement a manner; besides, she knew that all her aunt was saying would have a favorable after-effect on her mother, although it might not seem to have any now. Mrs. Patton had better control over her temper than her sister; her life had been too full of trials and annoyances that she was obliged to pass over unnoticed, to allow this little outbreak to disconcert her.

"That dress is a little too short for her, though she has had it only a few months, and it was the right length when it was new. She outgrows everything so fast it

is just impossible to keep her in proper clothes," she said calmly, surveying Irene's dress as she spoke.

"Lengthen them, then, by adding a ruffle or a pleating on the bottom, rather than allow her to show her ankles in that fashion just because she happens to grow rapidly." The words were very severe.

"Well, Mollie,"—Mrs. Patton's voice trembled and tears welled up in her eyes,—"I do the best I can. I have to do the work of the house and make the children's clothes myself, and I don't get the time to look after everything properly. I am obliged to have something else in my hands besides a needle all the time."

Irene unconsciously glanced at her mother's hands. She had never noticed before how red and knotted they were. The fingers looked hard and stiff in comparison with the soft, rosy-tipped fingers of the more fortunate sister. On the third finger of her mother's left hand a plain, well-worn ring was pressing into the flesh. It was her wedding-ring. Long ago she had been unable to remove it, her finger having grown so much larger from work since it had been placed there. In contrasting this with the jewelled rings on the hand of the other, Irene fell to wondering whether her mother's hands had once been white and delicate like her aunt's. Mrs. Patton was wiping the tears from her eyes, when, repenting the morning's rash act, and thinking only how hard her mother worked all the time, while she, the oldest child, was of no help to her, only an extra care, Irene, going towards her and putting an arm about her neck, said tenderly,—

"Don't cry, mother." Mrs. Patton, appearing to take no notice of her caress, went on to say,—

"And Irene, who ought to be a help to me and able to fix her own clothes, as I was at her age, does nothing but lie around from morning till night reading novels."

"Oh, mother, that is not true! You know I do not," said Irene, springing up excitedly.

"How do you dare to contradict me, when only this morning you left me slaving at my wash-tub to lie in your bed and read some worthless nonsense!"

"Yes, I did, because you will not let me read like other girls; because you won't allow me books of my own; because you won't even let me read the book Aunt Mollie gave you; and I am obliged to borrow what I want to read, and hide what I borrow as if I had stolen it. I only wanted to finish reading this one book before returning it this morning, when you took it from me and burned it!" she shouted. "Yes, burned it! and it did not belong to me, and I can never buy another to return in its place!" Irene's eyes were like fire in their brilliancy.

"Irene! Irene!" said her aunt, deprecatingly.

"I tell you, Mollie, you ought to be thankful you have no girls, to repay all your work and labor in bringing them up, in this way," said Mrs. Patton, encouraged by her sister's interference.

"In this way!" echoed Irene, scornfully. "It only happened once,—once!" she repeated, in a hard voice. "It will never happen a second time, I give you my word now,—for I have done with skulking around like a thief for the sake of reading a little from a book,—but I will read just the same, I will read just the same! and I'll sit right down here in a chair, openly, and read like any other civilized person,—that I will!

I bit your arm this morning because you burned that book, but if you burn another I'll kill you!" she shrieked, and turning, rushed from the room.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mrs. Bostwick, as the door closed after Irene, letting forth the breath she had been unconsciously holding back during this terrific outburst of passion.

"That goes to show the result of novel-reading," said Mrs. Patton. "Irene used to be of the mildest disposition in the world. I sometimes got vexed to think that she had no more spirit than she showed; but this morning she amazed me by breaking out in such a torrent of abuse that I was dumfounded, and can't account for it in any other way."

"Sarah, do you remember father's disposition? You have some of it; so have I; and so, I think, has Irene. She has possessed it all along, but you have just aroused and discovered it,—subservient almost to any who were considerate and kind to him, but like a wild animal when an injustice, real or fancied, had been done him. What was the book?"

"I do not know nor care."

"But, if it was not hers, you did wrong to burn it."

"I knew it was not hers. I burned it so they would lend no more to her, knowing what fate awaited them."

"Well, Sarah, there is no use in arguing with you, you won't listen to reason; but you will never be able to get that turbulent spirit under control again, I fear. And, now, you ought seriously to consider the question of Irene's dresses. Lengthen them at all means without delay. Did you notice how much prettier she looks with her hair dressed high? She is more beau-

tiful than I was at her age, and I caught a rich husband and a life of ease and luxury with my beauty. Take more pains with her dresses and marry her to some rich man."

Irene caught these last words on the other side of the door, where she was listening to learn the effect of her hasty words, and she ran immediately up-stairs to her room and looked long at the reflection of herself in the little mirror that hung there. Was she really so beautiful, then? Why had she never discovered it? why had no one ever told her so before? and why had no one ever admired and fallen in love with her already? were questions she asked herself. All the girls she knew had their sweethearts, yet she had none. It must be that her outlandish clothes made her unattractive: hereafter they should be different, even if she had to fix them herself. Thus she resolved as she looked at and admired herself in the mirror.

Seed had been sown on fertile soil: would it bring forth wheat or tares?

CHAPTER III.

"IRENE!" called out Mrs. Bostwick from her room the following morning. She had not yet risen, although the Patton family had already breakfasted and Irene was combing out and arranging June's hair in the room adjoining her aunt's, preparatory to starting to school.

"What is it?" answered Irene.

"Come in here before you leave for school, I have

something to say to you." Irene hurried to finish her task. Already she had combed up her own hair as nearly like Favette had arranged it the day before, as her inexperienced hands were able; and she had found a piece of soiled and faded red ribbon, which she had washed out and dried, and now wore tied about her throat, hoping thereby to improve her appearance.

"My dear," began Mrs. Bostwick, as soon as Irene entered her presence, "I was very sorry to hear you talk to your mother as you did yesterday."

"I could not help it; indeed I could not," murmured Irene, hanging her head in shame.

"Promise me that you will do so no more, and I will buy you another book to replace the one you borrowed." Irene promised—it is so easy to make a promise—and Mrs. Bostwick added, "I will call for you after school this evening, and we will go together and buy the book, and at the same time engage a dressmaker to make up the silk, which I brought to you, before I leave here. Now run along, or you will be late, and don't get into any more trouble with your mother hereafter, she has a hard enough life as it is. Wait; before you go take that faded ribbon from off your neck and open the lid of my trunk, you will find a new one somewhere there that you may have."

Irene, not a little piqued at the failure of what she had regarded as a great success, did as she was directed, and then, bidding her aunt good-by, hurried away.

Minnie Barnes was awaiting her below; and as they pursued their way together Irene gave her quite an exaggerated account of her aunt's wealth, her dresses, her jewels, her home, her husband, and her maid;

Minnie listening interestedly, smiling all the while during the recital, though there seemed no occasion for smiling.

She was a strange person, this young girl with the smiling countenance. She was not pretty, but had very attractive manners, being always courteous and polite to every one—the same agreeable person to rich and poor, stranger and intimate. Irene, who knew her better than any one in Newbridge outside of her own family, admired her very much because she was so agreeable, was continually saying such pleasant things, never grew angry or impatient at anything, but seemed always smiling and happy. True, there were times when the smile grew tiresome, when it was vexing and annoying to her. These were times when her own spirit, at war with self or others, sought for sympathy in friendly confidence, and failed to secure solace or comfort in the heart of one whose face reflected no particle of fellow-feeling. Yet she clung to her, being flattered by her attentions, and because there was no one else living near her of whom to make a friend, whose companionship was either proffered or desired; and Minnie Barnes continued to feed Irene's vanity, continued to seek her society, hoping through her to make and improve such other acquaintances as she might desire in Newbridge.

She had no affection for Irene such as young girls often have for each other, but felt only a selfish sort of regard, coupled with a desire to profit and advance through her. She saw in her a beautiful girl in humble station, yet certain to receive through her rare beauty much attention and many opportunities for advancement

in society; and, although she was not now popular, Minnie trusted, through her own influence over her, to induce her to seek popularity, and afterwards, as her friend, to share it.

It was a speculation carefully thought out and deliberated on beforehand, there being no other way apparent more favorable for making acquaintances. Her father's position in business was far above John Patton's, and ought to have insured for his family social prominence in a place like Newbridge; but there were ugly stories lurking about that might be unearthed and sent broadcast, casting ignominy on the family, should they attempt to push themselves or make any claims to social recognition. They had left the little town where they had formerly resided on account of the disgrace Mr. Barnes had brought on himself and his home by betraying the innocent daughter of a prominent citizen, —his own daughter's friend,—and then contemptuously abandoning her to her fate. In a frenzy of despair she had finally denounced him, showed the letters, couched in endearing terms, which he had written to her, and then cast herself into the river.

The same day that her body was found Mr. Barnes came to Newbridge, where the foundries with which he had long been connected were situated, rented the house on the hill just beyond Irene's home, and sent for his family—his wife, a son, and this daughter, Minnie—to join him.

Mrs. Barnes was a little, puny, delicate woman, having a very nervous temperament. At the time of her marriage she was an orphan and heiress, and had almost idolized her husband, so much she had loved him,

anticipating his every wish, lavishing her love and caresses upon him constantly, making his comfort and pleasure her ceaseless study and never permitting her desires to cross his; and he squandered her money, tyrannized over her, and finally, ceasing to find her attractive, deserted her society for that of other women. She drooped and grew despondent as one after another of the tangled episodes of his life came to her ear, and sorrow crept into her heart and stayed there. She faded as a flower from whose fair petals the sunlight has been withdrawn, lived secluded from all society, devoting herself with untiring energy and patience to the care and training of her children. Long ago she had ceased to watch for her husband's home-coming; long ago she had ceased the caresses which she saw were distasteful to him; and he—well, when a woman grows old and loses her beauty, her health, and her fortune, you can't expect such a man to devote himself to her as ardently as when she possessed all those charms. There are too many fair faces smiling up into his, out in the world, which he can drop, put aside, and forget when they cease to be attractive to him.

Minnie was like her father in temperament, looks, and disposition, although her nature had been somewhat modified by the loving attention of a devoted mother.

"Such a pleasant little thing! such excellent manners!" many an admiring mother said of her as she passed. This "pleasant little thing" had heard the story of her father's disgrace, knew the reason of their hasty removal from their former home, knew why her mother had remained in her room, refusing to see any

one of the family for days after their arrival at Newbridge, and why, when she did make her appearance, her eyes were bloodshot and the muscles about them drawn,—yet she never betrayed any sign of such knowledge, but went about the house, arranging each article of furniture so that it would appear to the best advantage, singing and smiling all the while.

When school was over, and the scholars were pouring out of the homely building where they had been housed all day, Irene found her aunt awaiting her outside in a carriage, and was not long in taking a place by her side. They drove about the city, stopping to purchase the novel, thence to the shop of the leading *modiste*, where the dress was left to be made and a promise extracted that it would be sent home completed on the next Friday afternoon, that Mrs. Bostwick might see and pass judgment on it before leaving Newbridge. Afterwards they drove out into the country, talking confidentially one to the other, quite after the manner of old and intimate friends.

That ride was full of enjoyment for Irene, though it would have been impossible for her to describe or relate faithfully the many and varied thoughts and impressions that filled her mind and soul throughout it. She would never have told them could she have recalled them, I am certain, because so many were vain, foolish, and absolutely selfish. With her quick perception she easily discerned, through the thin transparency that masked the inner self-consciousness and cold worldliness of the woman by her side, a nature akin to her own, that would be able to sympathize with her if she were to talk freely and openly of her hopes and plans,

of the drawbacks and stumbling-blocks in her daily life.

So when the opportunity presented, she began to open her heart and reveal her life, as it were, to her aunt by relating some annoying experiences by way of vindication for the hasty words spoken in her hearing the day before.

"I get so sick of having every request refused almost before it is uttered; of not being allowed to enjoy the only things that bring pleasure and entertainment to me, such as books, music, and painting; and of being obliged each day to sweep, cook, and scrub,—work from which my very soul recoils. Do you know that many times I think that I would rather die than continue living as I do, seeing nothing promised in the future that shall be better than the past or the present! And, when I think that I cannot die until my time comes, I study more earnestly each day in the hope of getting something better out of life,—of accomplishing something that may make it worth living. I am certain that I could improve myself, and perhaps gain some position in the world, if I might only have opportunity and encouragement. The drawing-teacher at school says I have great talent for painting, and I love to paint, but mother will not furnish me with paints and brushes. She says it is all nonsense, and that they didn't teach painting when she went to school, and they had just as fine scholars then as now; and father always sends me to mother, and says, 'Do as your mother thinks best: if she is willing, I am.' And to think that I can have instruction from an artist all the while, and may not take it because a few dollars

must be first expended on materials! So it is with music: I learn easily, and can play many airs that I have only heard others play once, yet I am rarely allowed to touch the piano. Oh, Aunt Mollie, you must not think me ungrateful, only wretched,—so wretched and unhappy! You say my dresses are too short. Do you think I have not known it? Do you think I have not known it for a long time and been humiliated on account of them? But of course you do not know,—how could you!"

The tears were coursing down Irene's cheeks, for she had renewed the experiences in relating them. Mrs. Bostwick was much moved.

"Poor girl," she said, sympathizingly, "I see how you are situated, and I am very sorry; but you must remember that your father is a hard-working man, and by no means rich. You should not seek what he cannot afford."

"I do not ask what he cannot afford,—that is just the trouble; I only ask a very little of what he is able to give, to help make me independent in the future."

"And that is just what he is doing for you: fitting you for a teacher," said Mrs. Bostwick.

"And do you think I will teach? Never! Not if they send me to school until I am gray. I'll starve rather than sit behind a desk day after day, trying to drum knowledge into a lot of numskulls! No, I will never be a teacher; the scholars always hate the one who is teacher. I want to be admired and looked up to; I want to do something that every one cannot do. Why has God given me talent and such a disposition, and then placed me as I am? I have never

dared to mention my ambition to any one before; but it has long been fixed and rooted in my heart. You do not sympathize with me, you cannot."

"Indeed, I do sympathize with you, my dear, although I have never been situated as you are. I can see what you want, and how your wishes are curbed, yet I would advise you to curb them yourself a little. Your parents love you, and are doing what they think is best for you; you cannot change their ways, for they are fixed, settled; but you can restrain your wishes, and be happier thereby. Try to be more like they would have you to be, and you will be more contented in consequence."

"And live here in Newbridge all my life, and eventually, perhaps, do menial work only? No! I can't, and will not try."

If Mr. Bostwick could have been a listener, unobserved, to this conversation, he would certainly have smiled to hear his quick-tempered, impetuous, wilful wife speak to this spirit so like her own in such calm, admonitory manner.

"Well, put a guard on your tongue, and you will spare many heart-pangs to your mother. Try to do that at least. I am sorry about the music and painting; but never mind them, work hard in school, accomplish all you can there, try to look well all the time, be polite and considerate in your manners, be careful in the selection of your associates, choosing only those who can elevate you socially, and, in time, you may attract the notice of some rich gentleman, who will ask you to marry him. I married such a one at your age."

"And Uncle Robert is thirty years older than you are, is he not?" Irene inquired, thoughtlessly.

"Yes," the answer came, short and hard. Irene had intended to follow the question with another, but thought better of it. They were riding along by a piece of woods that skirted the town. She changed the subject adroitly by saying,—

"Right here we can find some lovely wild-flowers, if you care to get out and search for them."

"Yes, let us gather some by all means, and then hurry back home again, or your mother will be worried about us."

Alighting from the carriage they wandered about the woods for a while, plucking such stray blossoms as they could find, emerging at length with hands full and faces radiant from the exercise. Youth and middle age! They looked too beautiful together not to awaken admiration.

On the way homeward, Mrs. Bostwick related to Irene the story of the picture of herself that had once hung in the Salon at Paris, which the wild-flowers had recalled to her memory,—told how the artist had stopped under her father's roof for several days, making sketches from her face.

"And where is the picture now?" queried Irene, deeply interested.

"I do not know, I am sure," replied her aunt. "It was sold for an enormous sum—many thousands of dollars—to some one in Paris; but to whom I have never been able to trace definitely, or I should have tried to purchase it myself."

Many thousands of dollars for one picture!—Irene's

eyes opened wide and her breast heaved,—and she had talent for painting! Just as quick as a lighted match will burn the flax it touches, so those words set fire to her determination to lose no time henceforth, but learn to paint at the cost of any sacrifice. A teacher at forty dollars a month? not she; but an artist with many times that sum, perhaps, for a single picture!

After tea that evening, Mrs. Bostwick, seating herself at the piano, ran her fingers lightly over the keys.

"Good heavens, Sarah, how long since this piano has been tuned?"

"I had it tuned only a year ago last summer, and it has scarcely been opened since," answered her sister.

"No wonder there is no music in it; it ought to be used every day to keep it in order. When do the girls practise?"

"June don't know nothing about music, and Irene has her school to attend to, so she doesn't get time to practise; besides, she doesn't know how to play much anyhow, and I thought she might only injure it."

"Injure it? I should say you were doing it an injury by allowing it to remain unused so long," said Mrs. Bostwick, closing the instrument.

The piano-tuner was sent for next day; and Irene was never afterwards denied the privilege of playing when her mother did not require her services elsewhere.

The days of Mrs. Bostwick's visit were full of both merriment and discord, and Friday, the day of departure, came all too soon. The dress was delivered in season, and she was delighted at the improvement it made in her niece's appearance. Irene, too, was happy in its possession, and was permitted to wear it all the

afternoon and evening, after her return from school, at her aunt's request, that she might appear as well as possible before her husband, who had come at noon to accompany her on the rest of her journey.

There was much bustle and confusion the few hours preceding their departure. Mrs. Bostwick was impatient, spoke sharply to Favette, and ordered her husband about as if he were a servant. It seemed as if his presence in the house was distasteful to her—she found so much fault with everything and everybody after he came.

"Don't forget what I have told you about your hair, your manner, your friends, and, most of all, your temper," said Mrs. Bostwick to Irene, a few moments before parting; and, slipping a five-dollar gold piece in her hand, added, "Buy some paints with that, and daub away to your heart's content, and try to be happy; it spoils your face to be cross and bad-tempered always." And straightway turning about, she responded impatiently and peevishly to something her husband was saying to her.

He did not seem to be annoyed, however, at her manner, but was so very calm and dignified in his demeanor all the while that Irene thought him proud and disdainful. He only meant to be considerate. For in contrasting the plain surroundings and humble appearance of the home of the Pattons with his own luxurious mansion and its appointments, he feared that his wife had been denied some comforts to which she had grown accustomed, so redoubled his attentions to her, executing her slightest wish as if it were an especial privilege granted to him.

Mrs. Bostwick was quite ready to take her leave when the time for her departure arrived; indeed, she had been anxious to go before, having soon wearied of the monotonous home-life of the Pattons, each day's routine being almost exactly like that of the day before.

"Good-by, my dear; write to me often and let me know how you progress. I shall be bored to death out West, and your letters will be very welcome," she said to Irene, after taking leave of the rest. "Robert," she continued, addressing her husband, "you must not forget to bid Irene good-by."

He had been standing, engrossed with his thoughts, gazing into the changing expressions of Irene's face, quite forgetful for a moment of his wife's presence. He was recalling a face like hers, only not nearly so beautiful, that had captivated him many years before, and was wondering whether her face would change as that one had, and her heart become as cold, selfish, and unsympathetic. Did he regret? No; but he thought that had he his life to live over from that time he would proceed differently, and perhaps be happier now in consequence. It must have been these very thoughts that led him, unconsciously, to press Irene's hand tightly in his own as he took leave of her, imprinting at the same time a warm kiss on her forehead, and saying, in a low voice,—

"Good-by, little girl; may you make some good man happy."

Irene looked up astonished at his manner and words; but already he was in attendance upon his wife, assisting her into the carriage. The door closed and they were gone. Regretfully she turned and went into

the house which, now that her aunt and Favette had gone out of it, seemed as empty as did her heart and life.

In the evening, as she sat in the parlor, idly running her fingers over the keys of the piano while waiting for Minnie Barnes to call for her on her way to the social, she recalled and pondered over her varied experiences of the past week,—the quarrel with her mother, her aunt's visit and the ride, the talks and the gifts it had brought, and, above all else, the hope it had aroused in her breast for the future. If the drawing-master at school had spoken honestly in praise of her talent, what glorious prospects might not life hold for her!

With the money her aunt had given to her at parting she would purchase the much-coveted paints and brushes, and need no longer continue, as had been her custom, to exchange mental labor for such materials as she required and could secure from pupils more fortunate in possessing the implements for art-work than ability to work out perplexing problems in mathematics. She had never begrudged the labor thus repaid in the past, only it brought with it, always, a humiliating sense of subservience, and she was gratified that there would no longer be need of such requited effort.

Impatient at her friend's delay, she went over to the window and looked out into the dark street, but was soon absorbed in thought again. This time it was not of her home, her aunt, nor her art, she was thinking, but of a step that had hurried to overtake her as she was coming from school that afternoon, and of a full, rich voice that had spoken her name. She had stopped when she heard it, and turning had encountered a pair

of honest brown eyes looking into hers, and had recognized, with a flush of shame, Frank Raynor.

He had spoken kindly to her, but she did not heed what he was saying, being unable to think of anything save that meeting of a few days before when she had been so very rude to him. He must have noticed her embarrassment, for he had said ever so gently,—

"I hope you do not consider me an intruder?" and though she had made haste to answer "No," she had lapsed into silence again, being unable to converse with him because of the predominance of that humiliating remembrance in her mind.

He had talked pleasantly of school-life until, chagrined at her own stupidity, she had burst forth with an apology when, interrupting her, he had begged her not to think of or refer to the subject, saying he had taken it for granted that she was suffering at the time from some secret or personal sorrow, and regretted only that he was unable to lighten or alleviate her distress in any way. She recalled his words now with much comfort, the only words of honest sympathy she had ever known. Once he had been her Sunday-school teacher,—thus had she first known him. In society his station was far in advance of hers, and he was much sought after by every one. It had been very generous of him to think of her fault so considerately.

Her reverie was here interrupted by her friend's arrival, who turned her about while admiring her new gown, saying, over and over again, "How becoming it is!" before they set out together.

"I saw you on your way home from school to-day," said Minnie, when they were out in the street; "and

I will forgive you this once for running away from me, though you could not have waited a second even, for I came home behind you all the way as far as the corner here."

"I did not wait at all; I hurried home because my aunt was going away."

"Now, Irene, that will do to tell; of course, you didn't know that you were likely to meet Mr. Raynor! —of course not: how should you?" continued Minnie, mockingly.

"Why, what are you talking about? Of course I didn't know; I met him by accident: and what of it?"

"Oh, nothing; only it is easy to see that he admires you very much, and he walks by your house each day. Have you never noticed him?"

"Why, no; I have never noticed his going past,—and what if he does?"

"Oh, how stupid of you! Why should he go, indeed! Not because it is such a beautiful street, I am sure; nor because it is the shortest way to his home either; but because—— Well, I think you do perfectly right to encourage him just a little; for, only think, if you were to marry him, you could live in that big house of his."

"Good gracious, Minnie! what are you trying to say? It's all nonsense anyway. Why, he used to be my Sunday-school teacher; and he is ever so much older than I am. Why—why, he never even thinks of me!"

"Oh, no; I should say not! the way he stares at you every Sunday in church and Sunday-school when you are not seeing him. Then, I noticed his manner to-day

as you walked from school,—very attentive, indeed! What was he talking about so earnestly?"

"Why, he was only saying—saying——" Irene hesitated, not willing to confide to Minnie even the substance of their conversation.

"Ah, you will not tell! I can easily understand how it is; and I will forgive you for withholding your confidence. Under such circumstances friends are always thrust in the background and confidence withheld; though why, at such a time and on such a subject, I am not able to understand. It seems like denying one's self a special gratification, and one's friend an uncommon pleasure; however, I hope you will pardon me for offering advice that was not needed," she said, laughingly, as they reached the church-door and went within, Irene vainly attempting to explain to her that she had been mistaken and was misunderstanding her.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK RAYNOR was the superintendent of one of the principal railroads running out of Newbridge. Ten years before he had come there from the East as an assistant to the former superintendent, and had been selected to fill the office at his death.

His father had been at one time a prominent official and stockholder in one of the most important of Eastern railroads, and had resided with his family, consisting of his wife and two children,—Frank and a

daughter younger than him,—in a magnificent home in Boston. In an evil hour, however, he began speculating in mines, made frequent visits to New York, returning each time more careworn and troubled, and finally, confessing himself bankrupt, gave up everything, even his home, to his creditors, and died soon after. Frank was but twenty-three then, calculating on a future for himself as an associate with his father in business. This sudden change in his prospects was therefore a great blow to him; yet he never murmured, but immediately set about seeking some available means of providing for his mother and sister.

One of his father's dearest friends, Mr. Blaisdell, had secured the place at Newbridge for him; promising, when he had gained sufficient knowledge of railroad affairs by experience there, to seek something better for him in the East; and Frank had gratefully accepted the appointment, glad to get away from the scenes of his father's misfortune.

His mother had inherited a small fortune by the death of her brother soon after he had come to Newbridge, and instead of coming with his sister to live there with him, she chose rather to remain in Boston, where they would be among old friends, calculating all the while that Frank would soon be with them there, according to Mr. Blaisdell's promise. But the months grew into years, and no change was suggested by Mr. Blaisdell, and Frank, being well satisfied where he was after his promotion, and being enabled to visit his mother frequently in Boston, never referred to the subject in any way.

His income being large and his expenses light, he

managed to lay by a goodly sum each year, and once he had conceived the idea of fitting up a pleasant home at Newbridge for his mother and sister, and inviting them to try life there. In pursuance of this plan he purchased, for less than half its original cost, a fine large residence, located in the most desirable part of the city, that had been offered for sale at public auction in settlement of an estate.

His plans were all disarranged, however, by his sister's marriage to a wealthy gentleman, who took his bride to as palatial a home as her father's had been, and persuaded her mother to live with them; so the great house at Newbridge, with its wealth of beautiful and tastily-appointed grounds, was offered for rent, and became the abode of strangers.

Through Frank Raynor's acquaintance with the pastor of Trinity Church, who proved to be a former college-mate of his, he came to attend church regularly, and at one time had been induced to take charge of a class of young girls in Sunday-school, one of whom was Irene. So had he first met her.

He only retained the class a short time, however. It was too discouraging to see a row of young girls before him each Sunday with their books invariably open at the wrong place, each one taking time to find the page and paragraph for reading when called upon, —not before; staring about the room or into vacancy as he sought to engage their attention by telling delightful stories and asking simple questions, and finding sometimes two girls whispering together at one end of the seat, and at the other end two more dividing candy which they had bought with the money given

them to place in the missionary-box, and the one whom he would be particularly addressing looking beyond him, and not hearing a word he was saying until recalled by a nudge from the one listener and "it's your turn," spoken in an audible whisper. He gave up the class, finally, in disgust. Irene always listened intelligently while he talked, and first attracted him because of her attention. Each week he looked eagerly forward to seeing the bright pretty face that always greeted him on Sunday afternoons; and often, after he had resigned his place as teacher, he found himself seeking her out from his corner in the minister's class in front, and watching with more than ordinary interest the changing expressions of her reflective countenance; and although it was almost two years since he had given up the class, yet his interest in Irene had never abated, but seemed to be increasing all the time. Lately, especially since the day he had discovered her crying along the streets, his thoughts had been full of her.

Her rebuff he had excused by attributing it to ill-feeling that had been aroused by cruelty, perhaps, on the part of her mother, whom he had heard spoken of as a hard-hearted, unsympathetic woman, hence unfit by nature to train such a tender, beautiful blossom. Becoming amazed at the way in which she was engrossing his attention and absorbing his thoughts, he sought to reason with himself once by saying,—

"There are many such misplaced people in life. They manage to worry through somehow; why should I bother myself over one of them?" And he fell to wondering what it was he found to interest him in the

daughter of a mechanic, and what his proud mother and sister would say if he should marry such an one. Then privately calling himself a fool, he had taken up a book and tried in vain to read from its pages and forget her.

"She has changed wonderfully in a short time," he said, the night of the social, as he gazed admiringly on her, not realizing that it was himself who had been changing gradually during a long time. Last Monday she had seemed like a child to him, to-night like a woman grown; and his eyes followed her every movement with increased interest and admiration. When she passed near him, somehow his heart quickened its beating, and he fairly burned with desire to walk along by her side. He did not follow this inclination, however, though he caught himself once opening and closing both of his hands as they hung by his sides in a nervous effort to keep himself from going over to where she sat and taking the vacant place next to her.

"How lovely that Patton girl looks to-night! It must be her dress that shows her beauty to such great advantage. I never saw her look so well!" he overheard one woman say to another. "That Patton girl" jarred on his ears; yet he found consolation in thinking that since others also admired her it was not strange that he should have been staring at her, so he cast another glance in the direction where she had been sitting, and, finding her no longer there, impatiently and hurriedly looked about the room, catching sight of her form at the door-way as she was leaving with her friend. Before he realized what he was about he was by her side, saying,—

"You are not leaving so soon?"

"Yes," she answered, showing surprise at his manner.

"But you two young girls must not go home without an escort, the night is dark. Wait one moment, please, while I get my hat, and I will go with you."

Before Irene could explain that Minnie's brother was outside waiting to accompany them he had gone, and there was no alternative for her but to await his return. When he came back, however, she told him, and besought him not to trouble himself unnecessarily; but he asked the privilege of accompanying her, nevertheless, and walked along by her side, Minnie and her brother being in advance of them.

"How have you enjoyed the evening?" he inquired, pleasantly.

"Not at all," she said; "that is, not as much as I had anticipated," she added, feeling that her first reply required some explanation, and not willing to give the true one.

The truth was, she had heard of a party one of her schoolmates had given the night before, to which she had not been invited; and then Belle Lawrence, an old acquaintance, had cut her. The knowledge of these slights, the latter one in particular, was sufficient to take away all her enjoyment of the evening.

The Lawrences and the Pattons had been neighbors for years, and had come from the same place, at the same time, to Newbridge, to try their fortunes anew. Mr. Lawrence had been more successful than John Patton, and the families had grown gradually apart, though they still continued to exchange friendly greet-

ings whenever they met. Lately, the oldest son of Mr. Lawrence had married the daughter of the leading merchant of Newbridge, and had been given an interest in his father-in-law's business; and since then it was no uncommon occurrence for his sister Belle to pass Irene on the street without even seeing her, where formerly she had been wont to stop and talk a few moments. So does success or advancement, coming however it may, influence the insipid, shallow nature, blinding it to everything save self-interest; leading it to appreciate no favor or attention save from those who feed its vanity, encourage its frivolity, and patronize its weaknesses.

And to-night Irene had approached Belle Lawrence and was about to address her, when she turned her back and walked away,—a deliberate cut, there was no denying it,—and Minnie had noticed it, so there was no pleasure to be obtained thereafter.

"I am sorry that you were disappointed. Did something trouble you and thus hinder your enjoyment? I noticed that you were looking serious; indeed, I think you appear serious oftener than you do happy," said Frank Raynor, seeking to gain her confidence, wishing to understand her better.

"No new trouble," she answered, her lips quivering. "Everybody and everything seems continually opposed to me." Then impulsively she added, after a moment's pause, "Mr. Raynor, I must speak out, for I shall never feel satisfied until I have told you why, on last Monday, I was so rude to you. The truth is, I was heart-sick and disgusted with life then, and did not care how I treated any one. My mother had taken a

book from me that I had borrowed and burned it, seeking to punish me thus for borrowing novels and cure me of reading them. It made me hate her, myself, and every one at the time." He could not see the tears, but they spoke in her tremulous voice.

"And did your mother do that?" he said, in surprise,—to his refined nature such an act seemed most cruel and repulsive. Not waiting for her to reply, he continued, "I am grieved to know of this. Perhaps there is more besides to tell? Do not hesitate to confide in me, for, be assured, I am and will always be your friend."

"No, there is nothing more to tell,—or, rather, there is everything. I believe ofttimes that,—but I can't talk now," she said, sobs choking her utterance, "only I am so wretched sometimes that I feel like running away." She had not intended to make a confidant of him, she wanted only to clear up and excuse her childish, impetuous deportment at the time in question, that it might not linger in his remembrance to her discredit.

"Oh, that you must never think of doing. It would be such a wild, insane thing for you to do. You have a good home, and your mother, of course, does not mean to be unkind——"

"But is, just the same!" she interrupted.

"Yes," he answered, thinking that ofttimes the lack of sympathy from those with whom we are daily associated is a more cruel affliction than bodily suffering. "Irene," he added, after a moment's silence, "is there any way in which I can be of help to you?"

"No, Mr. Raynor, you could never help me to see

my home differently from what it is, from what it has ever been; and there is no comfort, sympathy, or harmony to be found in it."

"I might help you to discover some; or I might even induce you to ignore that which is unpleasant and discouraging, and to overlook many of your mother's peculiarities."

"Mr. Raynor, if you but knew my mother, you would realize how useless any such effort would be. She thinks she knows all about everything, and that her judgment and decision must stand even against all reason; and when she makes a statement, she will cling to it even when she knows she is mistaken."

"Yet, after all, if you were to seek to please her,—not to discover and brood over her faults and provoke her by complaining of them."

"I do try to please her; but it is an impossibility."

"Irene, if you had any ambition for the future——"

"I have," she interrupted, quickly; "that's just the trouble. I want to become an artist, and mother thinks it is all folly, and won't listen to any reason on the subject."

"It is one of the most praiseworthy vocations you could choose," he said; "and, if you have ability to pursue it successfully, you will have many opportunities for meeting with people of refinement and intelligence, and their attention and respect you will certainly command if you are successful as an artist and your career as a woman is commendable. Picture a future as bright as your imagination will permit, and then say whether you can afford to humiliate yourself now by disputations that can have no

ultimate results in your favor, that only arouse all that is unpleasant and rebellious in your disposition, that appeal to your baser nature alone, and are in themselves degrading; remembering always that you are now laying a foundation for that future."

"But I have not the slightest hope or chance of becoming an artist without help from home, and it will never be given me."

"No man can say what the future holds for him. Is it not as well—certainly it is more encouraging—to hope that your ambition will be gratified some day, and to make a proper preparation now? Why not, at least, cultivate a beautiful character; cease to waste time in fruitless argument or open contest; look for good instead of evil? Such effort cannot fail to meet with some reward; and, at any rate, you will be better prepared to appreciate the realization of a future in sympathy with your heart's desire, should it ever be allowed you."

"But what am I to do when my mother is opposed to me, and determined to argue against all reason?"

"Exercise self-control; do not oppose her; do not argue, but listen to her in silence; you will thereby be showing her proper respect, and save yourself much valuable time and humiliation. Fix your standard of life high, and work towards it, thinking constantly of progression. Let every act of your most private life be made with a view of fitting yourself for the result you hope to attain. I do not mean to dictate a course of action or fix a rule for you to follow. I offer these words of advice only as friend to friend."

They had reached Irene's home,—it was only a short

distance away from the church,—and there was no time to say more.

"I have never looked at life or thought of the future before as you have presented it to me, Mr. Raynor," Irene said, slowly and thoughtfully. "I believe that I have been taking a wrong view of it all along, and that you are directing me aright. I thank you." She extended her hand to him, continuing, "I thank you, and will seek hereafter to profit by what you have said. Good-night."

He held her hand in his own a moment, without attempting to say anything more; then, waiting until she had entered the house and closed the door behind her, he walked slowly away. He had been amazed at the calmness of her tone and the quietness of her demeanor at the last, in such striking contrast, as it was, to her tone and manner at the beginning of the conversation.

"It is pitiful," he said many times, as he continued to think of Irene and her home-influences, wondering all the while why he gave so much thought to her, never realizing how closely akin was pity to a warmer feeling that was struggling for supremacy in his breast.

CHAPTER V.

SCHOOL had been closed for the summer vacation almost two weeks, when, one evening, Irene gathering together some sketches she had been painting, carried them up to the home of her friend, Minnie Barnes, to show them to her for the first time and see what judgment she would pass on them. There were a marine view, a landscape, and some sketches of flowers in the collection, the result of diligent effort, all painted at odd intervals when she could steal the time, since her aunt had gone away.

"I will be an artist," she had said, with settled determination, as she went to her room that night after returning from the social with Frank Raynor. "It is the only way I may have of improving my condition. I will build my hopes on attaining success in art; some good angel will surely happen along to help me out of the rut in which I am now living and direct me in the surest way to fame; meanwhile, I will work diligently to the best of my knowledge and ability, that no time may be wasted." And she settled herself to work out her future.

"What do you think of my sketches, Minnie? Do you think I will ever become an artist?" she inquired of her friend, after showing to her the last of the pictures she had painted.

"What a question of you to ask of me! An artist? Why, you are one already: are you not?"

"I an artist? You are laughing at me. Why, I have

scarcely learned to mix the paints, and can only make little sketches like these you have just seen. How are you impressed by them? Do they look right and natural to you? Now these pansies,—do they look like real pansies?" Irene questioned, holding up a card on which she had painted a cluster. Minnie had already looked over all of her pictures, giving equal praise to each, though Irene felt confident that some were less deserving than others, so believed that the praise was not sincere.

"Tell me, honestly, what do you think of them?" she continued. "I won't get angry, because I want really to know if what I have done seems to another to have merit."

"I did tell you that they were all pretty; of course, I am not an art critic, and only say what I think. They look all right; only, I like those pansies least of any; they don't look just like real pansies."

"There, now, I knew you were not in earnest when you spoke of all my sketches being perfect. Do always be frank with me, Minnie, and say what you really think, so I may improve where I am at fault," Irene answered, impatiently.

"You ought to know better than I whether they are right or not: I don't understand painting, and you do," Minnie replied.

"I wish I did, then you would think you might pluck those pansies,—they would seem so life-like; but I don't understand thoroughly the mixing and laying on of the colors." And Irene held the picture at arm's length, surveying it with head inclined first on one side and then on the other. "If I had begun to take lessons at the commencement of school I would not now

be wasting so much time and paint in experimenting; but now school is closed, and I have the whole summer before me in which to practise, with but little knowledge to guide me. It is always the way; I never have any good fortune!" she said, despondently.

"Why did you not commence, then, at the beginning of school, if you wanted to learn so much? I don't see why you care so much about painting anyway. I would eversomuch rather embroider and crochet; it is faster work, much more delicate, doesn't soil the hands; and then, one can talk at the same time. And a woman always appears to advantage with pretty colored silks and wool in her hands,—especially when the color is becoming to her,—while paints are dirty; your hands and finger-nails and clothes are constantly being daubed with them, and you have to sit just so, and have just such a light, and always look so careless and slovenly," said Minnie.

"Yes, but you might crochet and embroider all your lifetime without acquiring name or fame. Who ever heard of a distinguished crocheter and embroiderer? Who ever read in the society notes of the city journals, 'Among the distinguished guests was Mrs. Sylvanus Jones, the celebrated embroiderer and crocheter from London'? No one, I am sure. The best artist at that work in Newbridge is that little dried-up old maid, Miss Snow, who keeps a little shop down on Barrow Street, and peddles out silk and zephyr in penny skeins, who imitates any kind of fancy work she ever saw, and yet never gets invited anywhere, and is as poor as a church-mouse, I fancy, too. No: I would rather have a little paint on my clothes and hands and not look so

well, and take my chances of obtaining some prominent position in the future, and of becoming a woman of distinction and note in the world."

Irene spoke with much earnestness and decision. When she finished a light laugh rippled forth from Minnie's lips,—a gentle, playful, yet insinuating laugh; and it was such an unusual thing for her to laugh aloud that Irene turned towards her abruptly in astonishment.

"Why, what are you laughing at?" she inquired. For answer came another burst of laughter, and then Minnie replied,—

"The idea of my crocheting all my life! I never thought of such a thing! I meant for pastime only. Don't you paint for pastime, and for the sake of the little ornaments and fancy things you can make?"

"For pastime? No; I want to become a great artist. Why, do you never make any plans for the future? Don't you ever think what you will make of yourself?"

"No, certainly not; why should I? My fortune comes fast enough; it makes itself; why need I worry about it? I shall marry some one, of course, so soon as I am old enough, and settle down in my own home. Besides, how do I know I will live to accomplish a future, even if I planned for it?"

"But suppose you did not marry, and suppose you did not die, wouldn't you like to feel that you had made a place for yourself in the world,—at least, that you would be able to earn a living for yourself, if obliged to do so?"

"What nonsense! Of course I shall marry; and even if I do not, why, I have a home with papa and mamma always. I guess I wouldn't suffer!"

"But it's such a satisfaction to feel that one has the power to do something for one's self, even if not required to exert that power," Irene urged.

"And wear yourself out, and use up the best years of your life in hard work, toiling, scheming, and planning for what may end in a failure after all. Why, here you are already becoming a little old woman with worrying and working all the time,—ever since you have started on this painting business. You are not a bit like you used to be, Irene. And, after all, what does your work amount to?—a bunch of bad pansies and several other daubs!"

"Daubs? You just now said they were pretty and natural!" said Irene, indignantly.

"That was only because I did not want to hurt your feelings."

"Your consideration lacks the virtue of duration; you might have spared them now."

"Well, little old woman, what do you expect to make of the future, anyway? Do you intend to paint violets and pansies all your life?" Irene's eyes flashed at the mocking tone.

"No," she replied, with decision, "I do not. I intend to paint pictures with people, houses, trees, water, animals, and the sky in them,—everything in fact, if I can only have some one to teach me how to paint them properly. I feel that I have the power to do them; I feel that I will do them some day. Just now,—why, these pansies,—why, everything must have a beginning. I am simply practising with the colors now, that is all."

"Don't get so excited about the matter, Irene," said

Minnie, smilingly, "it is not worth while. I meant no unkindness whatever. I wanted only to discourage you, because I think you would be happier if you could get these extravagant ideas out of your head. You have changed wonderfully of late; you have grown old in a day, and are not like the same person you used to be. I tell you, if I had your face and figure, your hair and eyes, I would devote more time and attention to dress and the improvement of my personal appearance, and think of marrying, instead of——"

"Marrying!" Irene interrupted, with surprise and disgust.

"Yes; why not? You know yourself that you are handsome,—you might marry whom you chose!"

"The idea! And what then? Settle down in my own home and do as mother does, growing cross, ugly, and disagreeable? No, thank you; I would rather paint."

"What! You don't mean to remain single all your life?"

"That does not necessarily follow. I may and I may not. At any rate, I shall not think of marriage for some time to come,—certainly not until I am sought in marriage."

"Irene, you are growing to be very disagreeable; you haven't a thought for anybody or anything, except those paints, of late. I talk to you, and you never hear a word I am saying half of the time. I wish you had never heard of painting," said Minnie, regretfully.

"Since I am so disagreeable and uncompanionable,

I will no longer intrude myself upon you," and Irene sulkily gathered her sketches together and prepared to take her leave.

"That's it; just fly off at a tangent and go home mad! Two months ago we never thought of a quarrel, now we never meet without one."

"Two months ago I was asleep, now I am beginning to awaken. Two months ago I never thought of seeking from you what I have lately sought and failed to secure, your sympathy as a friend in a new undertaking."

"Why, Irene, I sympathize with you, indeed I do," said Minnie, coaxingly, fearing a breach was forming between her friend and herself, and anxious to bridge it over before it was too late.

"No, you cannot sympathize with me, because you are not able to understand me. You say I have grown older; perhaps you are right; perhaps I have outgrown you." And with this parting thrust Irene hurried out of the house and went homeward, heavy-hearted and full of disappointment. She had long since ceased to seek for sympathy at home, and had never before sought it from her friend,—the feeling she harbored for Minnie seemed always to forbid it,—yet this evening she had overcome that feeling and had talked freely of her hopes and plans, and the chilling response she had met with made her heart-sick. She was never able thereafter to overcome the effect of that conversation, and to feel the same warmth and fervor of friendship for Minnie she had felt before.

CHAPTER VI.

It was near the close of the last day of June. Irene was seated on the topmost step, and leaning against the pillar of the veranda which fronted her home, looking unusually attractive in a white muslin gown, her hair falling about her shoulders a mass of clustering curls, her hands clasped idly in front of her, her dreamy eyes gazing intently away in the clouds, and her thoughts in company with them.

It was unusual for her to sit thus unoccupied, for, when she had finished her daily house-duties, she would paint if the light was good, or play on the piano the few snatches of music with which she was familiar, anxious to be engaged in some agreeable occupation rather than have her mother bring out a basket of stockings for her to mend. There were always stockings to mend, and they always had such yawning holes in them; but her mother could never bear to see any one idle, so the stockings were infallibly brought out when there was nothing else to be done.

But there was something of more consequence absorbing Mrs. Patton's attention this evening, and Irene knew she could sit idle without fear of interruption. The day had been an important one for the family, for on that day John Patton had been promoted to the position of foreman in the shops, with an increase of salary to almost twice the amount which he had been before receiving. It was an unusual occurrence for one of the

workmen to be placed over his fellows; but the former foreman had resigned without the usual preliminary notice, and, as the place was one that could not remain vacant, John Patton, who had long held the position of master-workman, was selected to fill it. A proud man he was, too, as he entered his home that evening, and said in a quiet tone of voice, as if speaking of an every-day occurrence,—

"Well, Sarah, I have got the foremanship."

"The what?" inquired his wife, not realizing what he meant by the "foremanship," but having a vague idea that it was some position in the lodge to which he belonged.

"Why, I have been appointed foreman in the shop, in Mr. McFarland's place."

"Well, I like that kind of talk, I must say," said Mrs. Patton, doubtingly, as she went from the dining-room to the kitchen while preparing the evening meal.

"You don't believe it, do you?" John Patton went on to say, fumbling about in his pockets, among some letters and papers. "Then look at this!" and he drew out a letter and handed it to Irene, who stood near him, saying, "Show that to your mother." Irene took it and read it first, exclaiming,—

"Oh, mother, it is true: papa has been appointed foreman, sure enough!"

"Here! let me see!" said Mrs. Patton, taking the paper from Irene's hands and going into another room to peruse it. It was a formal notice from headquarters of his promotion, to take effect the following day.

"Well, how did this happen?" she inquired, after reading it.

"You see that paper. You know as much about it as I do. Mr. McFarland quit, and they have given me his place. That's all I want to know. I am satisfied; aren't you?"

"Yes," she answered, slowly. "Only it seems strange; that's all."

The truth was: John Patton at home and John Patton in the shops were two different men entirely. At the shops he was considered an excellent workman, and did earnestly and intelligently whatever he undertook. He was an important personage among his fellow-workmen, and had great influence with them; but the moment he entered his wife's presence he seemed to lose his individuality, and was swayed hither and thither, as she willed, like a reed in the wind. Whether this was a matter of policy on his part or the result of his great love for her I am not able to say; only certain it was that Mrs. Patton was the head of the family, and that she had held sway for so many years that she had come to believe that her husband could not accomplish anything without her especial direction, advice, and assistance, which she always gave quite freely. So imbued had she become with this sense of her own importance that she could not realize all at once that her husband had been promoted without an especial effort on her part to bring it about. So she handed the notice back to him without comment. Just as she did so, the whole family was startled by a terrific pull at the door-bell.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Patton, as she turned to open the door. "Whoever that is had better pull the bell down at once."

It was a boy with a telegram for her. She opened it hastily, and read aloud,—

"Robert was thrown from carriage and killed instantly. Have telegraphed Robert, Junior, to come. Body will be taken to New York for interment.

MARY E. BOSTWICK."

A gloom fell over the family at this unexpected and sad intelligence.

"Poor Mollie!" said Mrs. Patton, wiping tears from her eyes on her apron.

"Poor! I should say now that she was rich," her husband had the misfortune to remark.

"John!" she answered him, sharply, "how can you talk in that heartless, calculating way, when he was such a dear, good man?" And she shed tears enough for all of them. No one seemed to care for any supper; and when it was over, Mr. and Mrs. Patton sat down in-doors, to talk over the change in their own affairs and the change in the affairs of Mrs. Bostwick; while Irene, who had been strangely silent all the while, too full of sympathy for her aunt to say anything, and anxious to get out in the air, where she could breathe freer, went out on the veranda.

June was there before her, seated on the lower step, arranging a piece of black calico as a sash about the waist of the doll her aunt had given her. Irene watched her absently for a time, while she listened to her father and mother within as they discussed the probable disposition which Mr. Bostwick had made of his fortune. Soon ceasing to heed what they were saying, however,

she became absorbed in her own thoughts,—wondering how her aunt would bear her sudden affliction, and whether she would deeply and forever mourn her loss, or soon forget it, as she did so many other things.

Tenderly she recalled the tall, dignified old gentleman, who had kissed her and pressed her hand so warmly and spoken such strange words to her at parting. She could see him now, in her mind's eye, as he tenderly assisted her aunt into the carriage at their departure, and seated himself by her side, smiling and lifting his hat in a final farewell. It was terrible to think that now he was lying away out there in a strange country cold and lifeless! Where was his spirit? Up, up beyond the clouds perhaps; surely it must be in heaven.

The sun was sinking behind the horizon, the sky was a brilliant crimson, fading away into blue and gray; the soft fleecy clouds were golden tipped, reflecting the last rays of the setting sun. The sight was beautiful to see. Was heaven beyond them? Who knows? Death would not be such a fearful thing, even after a life of pleasure and happiness on earth, if one might be permitted to look behind this delicate curtain. So ran her thoughts as she watched the shifting clouds with a newly-awakened interest in them. She looked up in embarrassment as Frank Raynor paused before the gateway, and, opening the latch, came towards her.

"Am I interrupting a day-dream?" he said, pleasantly, extending his hand.

"No, no," she answered, hastily; then perceiving that he had evidently come to make a call, added, "Will you not come inside?"

"No, thank you: if you will permit me, I would much prefer to remain outside here with yourself and June," and he seated himself on the step beside her without waiting for her to reply. "I have brought a book with me that I think you will enjoy reading," he continued, holding it towards her; "it is J. G. Holland's 'Katrina,' a beautiful story in verse. Have you ever read it?"

"No," she answered, turning over the pages of the book; "and it is very kind of you to bring it to me, I am sure, and I thank you."

"My doll had to be dressed in mourning, see, because Uncle Robert is dead!" said June, at this juncture, seeing she was failing to receive any attention, and holding up her doll for his inspection.

"Uncle Robert dead?" he inquired, looking towards Irene for explanation.

"Yes; we received a telegram this evening from Mrs. Bostwick, our aunt, who is in Colorado, telling us that her husband had been thrown from a carriage and killed, and that they will take him home to New York to bury him. It was a great shock to us. He was such a nice old gentleman, and so devoted to Aunt Mollie. Only a few short weeks ago he was here, well and happy; it is hard to realize that to-day he is out there in Colorado, dead!" said Irene, seriously.

"It is, indeed, very sad. Was he so very old?"

"Nearly seventy, I believe."

"Was he Robert L. Bostwick, a broker, of New York?" inquired Frank Raynor, with much earnestness.

"Why, yes. Did you know him?"

"Yes, yes,—and he is dead?" he answered, gravely. "My father knew him better," he added.

"Why, how strange! He was here but a short time ago, with Aunt Mollie. Did you know Mrs. Bostwick, too? She is my mother's youngest sister."

"No, I never met Mrs. Bostwick, and my father's acquaintance with her husband was only a business one. Through him my father became poor,—lost everything,—and died in the prime of life, a broken-hearted man. Had it not been for Robert Bostwick, without doubt I might now be holding a position of more credit even than the one I fill. I might never have—— But why should I talk to you in this fashion; he was your uncle, and he is dead; let him rest in peace." He spoke with much feeling; then, turning to Irene, he extended his hand, saying, "Forgive me; I forgot for the moment that he was dear to you, and thought only of the misfortune of those I love which he helped to bring about. It was very selfish of me to so forget myself. Pray, pardon what I have said."

"No, go on; I would like to know the whole story; won't you please tell me; you will not offend me at all. Why, I never saw him but once; that was when he stopped here a few weeks ago on his way to Colorado. He was here but a few hours only. I would like very much to know about your father's acquaintance with him,—that is, if you are willing that I should," she said, earnestly.

"Some time I may tell you all about it. Not now, though, not now."

Through the open door-way, out from the sitting-

room at the farther end of the house, came the angry voice of Mrs. Patton in excited argument with her husband. What the subject of disagreement was Irene could not understand. She only knew that there was a controversy going on inside, and, by the pitch of her mother's voice, that she was certainly getting the worst of it; and she was chagrined that Frank Raynor should be a listener. She shifted about uneasily for a moment, then drawing June towards her, she begged him to excuse her for whispering, and breathed a message into the child's ear. June ran in-doors immediately, and out in front where they sat, both Irene and Frank heard her distinctly say,—

"Mamma, Irene says I am to tell you that Mr. Raynor is here." The voices within were instantly hushed, but the silence that followed outside was embarrassing in the extreme.

In consideration for Irene, Frank Raynor rose, saying,—

"I must not remain longer, as I have letters to write." Then, noticing the look of humiliation that overspread her countenance, and anxious to have her understand that he esteemed her no less because of the little incident which had just transpired, he continued, "I would like to remain longer and talk with you here, but——"

"No, no, no," she interrupted. "It is not pleasant here for you—for me—for any one. I understand how it is; do not seek to explain." The tone was soft and pleading; the face turned towards him so beautiful that he averted his glance for a moment, to release himself from its thraldom, lest he be swerved from

the course he had determined on pursuing, even against the dictates of his heart and inclination.

"Do not misunderstand me," he continued, calmly. "I find such pleasure here in your company that I was about to say that I hoped to be permitted to come when I can remain longer." She did not seem to heed what he was saying. It was evident that she believed he was making polite excuses for the sake of getting away. So, determined to reassure her, he added, hastily, as if in sudden recollection, "How do you expect to spend the Fourth?"

"I do not know. I have thought nothing whatever about it. Remain at home most likely all day and mope or read."

"Mr. Cresson, Mr. Bird, and myself are making up a fishing party for that day on The Heights. I would like to have you join us, if you think you would enjoy it."

"Oh, I should be delighted!" she said, eagerly; adding, with some hesitation, "but who else is to be of the party?" He named over several people. They were all known to her, though she was known to scarcely any of them, and they represented some of the first people of Newbridge.

"Do you think they will like to have me with them?" she questioned, vexed with herself for asking it as soon as she had spoken.

"They? I know I shall like very much to have you with us. Indeed, the day will not be so pleasant if you are not there. Further than that, you will only have to decide whether it will be enjoyable for you. Suppose you think of going to please yourself and me,

and together we will try to get pleasure out of the excursion."

Irene smiled as she answered,—

"You are very kind to invite me, Mr. Raynor, and I will go, and am sure to enjoy myself."

"That is all that is necessary for me to know, then, and you have only to be ready at nine on the morning of the Fourth, when I will call for you. Good-evening."

They were standing on the walk, half-way between the door and gate; the shades of night were fast gathering about them; a weeping willow, which grew in the corner of the yard near by, drooped its long branches across the walk, forming a canopy above their heads. No one was near, and, as he took her hand in his at parting, he raised it to his lips, pressing a warm kiss upon it, and before Irene could utter a syllable in remonstrance he was gone.

"I thought Mr. Raynor was here," said the sharp voice of her mother from the door-way.

"He was here, but he has gone now," Irene answered, quietly, as she turned and went slowly and thoughtfully up to her room. It was long after she had retired for the night before she fell asleep, being kept awake with busy thoughts.

Why had Frank Raynor, a man of such high standing in business and society, so far removed from her by position, age, and experience, moving in a different world from hers entirely, called upon her and invited her to go on this excursion in his company, when he might have chosen from the first families in the city a more suitable and agreeable companion? Could it

be, as Minnie had once said, that he cared for her a little? The breath came choking up in her throat at the thought; then, in vexation at herself for daring to so interpret his actions, she caught herself saying aloud, "Of course, he is not in love with me, it could never be possible; it must be that he pities my forlorn condition, and desires to bring some sunshine into my life." So she tried to make herself believe; and yet—and yet—there was his kiss on her hand.

After Frank Raynor had taken leave of Irene so abruptly, he went at once to his room,—a pleasant apartment in the second story of a substantial frame house, with windows looking out on one of the pleasantest streets in West Newbridge, and furnished in such a manner as to indicate the refined and luxurious taste of its occupant. When he had donned his dressing-gown and slippers, he seated himself before an open desk and wrote earnestly for some moments. He seemed not satisfied with what he had written, however, for, when he had finished, he paced the floor in deep thought, anon returning to the desk and reading it over; and once, with elbows on the mantel, and with his chin resting on his two hands, he peered into the faces of the pictures of two women that were side by side, in an upright frame, standing there: the pictures of his mother and sister.

"It is of no use," he said, at length, aloud, as he turned from an absorbing study of their faces, "I am bound to make a fool of myself, anyway. I have avoided that little thing as much as I could; I have sought to thrust her out of my thoughts and to forget her,—to think of any one else save her,—and with

what result? Here I have invited her to go with me to The Heights next Friday. It must be love that has possession of me. How did it ever steal into my heart without my knowledge? Not being able to overcome it, I will be obliged to succumb to its power. So what is the need of writing to my mother that I have fallen in love with a young girl whose mother is a bundle of arrogance and ignorance, and whose father is a mechanic,—asking her to advise me, when all the while I know I will marry her in the end, even if the whole world objects! No! stop, my boy! You will not marry her if she herself objects. This little creature who is so disturbing your peace of mind, and whose fair face, tender blue eyes, and mass of golden curls, is so constantly before you,—waking or sleeping,—she may not be as willing to look up with love and confidence in your face as you are to look down into hers. Bah! I am losing my good judgment, indeed," he said, as he pondered over that side of the question, "to write a description of her, her people and surroundings, to my mother and sister, asking whether they considered with favor such an alliance for me, when she herself may never listen to me a moment after I have confessed my love and sought hers in return!"

He walked towards the desk, took up the letter and tore it into pieces; then, with a feeling of relief, he lighted a cigar and sat down to think; and his thoughts were full of Irene Patton. The more he thought of her the more intense seemed to grow his love and enthusiasm, until it reached such a pitch that he determined without delay to fall at her feet as her suitor.

He looked towards the clock on the mantel: ten

minutes past eleven. Too late to think of it now. Besides, he must first win her or sacrifice his affection at a barren shrine.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE HEIGHTS" was the name given to a plot of ground slightly elevated above the surrounding country, and situated about two miles and a half out of Newbridge. It was a woody section, rich in shade and pleasant breezes, with a clear stream of water—one of the lesser branches of the L—— River—running along one side, in which fish in large quantities were to be found in season,—making it an agreeable and popular resort for the people of Newbridge.

A pleasanter spot in summer-time could not be desired by one anxious to get away from the busy world and enjoy solitude and quiet, broken only by the singing of birds among the trees; and with the companionship of congenial friends, its cooling shades offered enticement stronger than any place, occupation, or entertainment, in the dusty, smoky city.

Almost every city and town, however unpretentious, has somewhere in its confines, or near its boundaries, just such an enchanting spot, a cosey nook, with a carpet of green sward and its decorations and adornments, beautiful and varied, contributed and arranged to fill the heart's desire by the greatest of all artists,—Nature. A place, in which, leaving all noise and care behind, to seek and secure rest and comfort. Did I say

comfort? rather let me say that such a spot, with its soft, cool, green couches, where one may lie in the shade of a friendly tree, look about on the marvellous handiwork of God, and listen to the sweet voices of the singing birds, offers more than that,—luxury!

Here, on "The Heights," late in the afternoon, on the Fourth of July, a merry party was seated about on the ground under the shade of a huge oak-tree that spread its leafy branches above them in kind protection from the scorching rays of the sun.

It was the fishing party. They had long since ceased fishing, or rather their attempts at fishing, for, with the exception of two or three very small specimens, which had been thrown back into the stream as soon as caught, no fish had been taken from the water that day, save by one of their number who had wandered up the stream, a distance away from the rest, and returned just as they were about to partake of luncheon with a fine string of goodly-sized ones. The rest of the party attributed their failure to the fact that they had been over-hilarious,—laughing, talking, and merry-making as they had been constantly since their arrival. The day had been a very enjoyable one, the luncheon, which had been put up at the "Chesterfield," the leading hotel at Newbridge, was eaten with much relish; and, tired out from the day's sport, they had seated themselves about on the ground, and were listening with much interest to a merry tale which Mr. Bird was reciting.

Irene was there in their midst, attired in a plain white muslin; a rough straw hat, with wide brim shading her pretty face, trimmed in some white, soft material, with strings of the same tied beneath her

chin; seeming quite at her ease and looking so very fair, young, and innocent, and, withal, so radiantly beautiful that Frank Raynor could scarcely keep his eyes from off her.

When he had called for her that morning she had seemed embarrassed, and the embarrassment had increased as they joined the rest of the party in the stage-coach that had been secured to convey them thither. It had all worn away, however, soon after their arrival at "The Heights"; and, as she became acquainted with those who were strangers to her before, she joined in their conversation as if she had been among them all her life.

He was filled with pride and gratification as he noted this, and that she was the recipient of much attention from every one.

"I wonder whatever possessed Frank Raynor to bring that Patton girl with him, to-day!" Belle Lawrence had said aside to Dora Clark, piqued at the attention Irene was engrossing.

"Why, don't you like her?" said Dora. "I think she is charming! He admires her, no doubt, and so do all the rest, evidently. Look there, now!"

Mr. Bird, Mr. Cresson, and Sydney Lawrence were with Irene apart from the rest, watching with keen enjoyment her timid efforts to detach a small fish, which she had just caught, from her hook.

"She is such a child, and her people are so plebeian."

"So were mine, if by that you mean uneducated, working people," replied outspoken Dora Clark; "and they were good, honest, and respectable; but is that, do you think, a reason I should not be here?"

"You are such a peculiar person," replied Belle; "so horribly in earnest always!"

From that moment Dora Clark became interested in Irene. She went over to where she was standing and kept near her side, a self-appointed champion, the rest of the day, and in after-years became one of her truest friends.

She was a woman of fine education and a finished musician; ten years older than Irene. Her parents, both long since dead, had been as she had said, unlearned working people; she had known all the privations of poverty early in life, they having denied themselves many comforts that every available penny might be spent in educating her and improving her talent for music.

Her reputation and social standing were irreproachable, and her society was much sought after and enjoyed by all who knew her. She was a charming conversationalist, possessing a sympathetic mind and heart, and a vein of humor that lent a delicious flavor to what she said. She was very plain in feature, though no one ever seemed to notice it, and she never forgot, nor made any endeavor to forget or conceal, any of the details of her early life, but talked freely and tenderly of her parents' struggle with poverty in their effort to educate her. Perhaps it was this remembrance that led her to sympathize always and lend a helping hand to youth struggling for advancement against similar reverses; for her life was marked by acts of kindness and charity, and words of encouragement for the unfortunate and faltering.

She had never talked with Irene Patton before, but had often noticed and admired her pretty face. Now

she was drawn towards her irresistibly by the knowledge that her people were such as her own had been, and by the thought that she was probably now enduring some of the same privations and humiliations that had once been hers.

That day was one long to be remembered by Irene. She had met new people,—such people as she had often desired to become acquainted with,—and they had all been kind to her; she had been in the midst of intelligence and refinement, and understood more clearly than ever before what Frank Raynor had meant to convey to her in the talk they had had together the night of the social. It came to an end all too soon for her, for returning home meant the awakening from a happy dream to stern, unpleasant reality.

When they were back in the city, one of the party, Mrs. Barron, invited Irene with the rest to come to her house and witness a display of fireworks that evening, but she declined as gracefully as she could, saying that she was expected home.

"Why do you not go with them?" she inquired of Frank, as he bade adieu to the rest and turned to accompany her.

"And leave you to return alone? Oh, Irene!"

"Why not? I am not afraid. It is early yet, and I am used to going about alone; it is too bad for you to miss the pleasure on my account."

"It will be no pleasure without you, Irene, even if it were not the proper thing for me to escort you home, having taken you from there on this expedition. I would rather have one moment of your society than hours with the rest."

"You say that to flatter me. Don't, I beg of you. I feel as if you were laughing at me——"

"Laughing at you! Surely you do not think me so unmanly."

They were passing by the corner on which his house stood. Irene, looking up at it, saw by the bare windows and deserted aspect that it was empty, and not heeding his last remark, said, in surprise,—

"Why, is there no one living here, now?"

"No; it was vacated the first of the month," he answered, gravely. Then, stopping in front of the gate, he said, "Do you like the place, Irene?"

"Indeed I do! I wish we might live here, or even in this neighborhood, instead of in that horrid old street where we do."

"You may live here if you will; the house shall belong to you and be your home, if you will only let me share it with you."

He spoke so calmly that Irene looked up at him in amazement when he had finished.

"Why, Mr. Raynor,—why do you talk in that way to me?"

"Because I love you, Irene; because I want to take you away from the influences that now surround you, and devote my life to your service, and to securing your advancement and happiness. I want you for my wife, to walk by my side through life. Can you not understand and return my affection a little?"

While he was speaking her slight form quivered perceptibly. When he paused, she waited a moment before making reply, and spoke finally, her voice trembling as if in affright,—

"I,—it seems so very strange. I hardly know how to take you, Mr. Raynor."

"Take me as I mean: I love you; I love you; I want you to be my wife. Do you love me in return? and are you willing to take me as your husband? That is what I have been trying to say."

She could not fail to understand him now, and her face crimsoned as she answered,—

"I don't know, Mr. Raynor; I have never thought of marrying; the idea of it now is so odd to me. I like you very much, I am sure, but——"

"You do not love me?" he faltered.

"I do not know. Let me have time to think it all over; a little while, an hour, a day, then I can tell you."

"A month if you require it, only try, all the time, to bring your heart in sympathy with mine."

She made a move to continue on their homeward way, and he proceeded with her.

"Irene, you think what I have said is very strange, don't you?" he continued; "you are surprised at it."

She inclined her head in silent reply.

"Shall I tell you how I grew to love you?"

Again she bowed assent.

"Well, you first attracted me when, as a pupil, you sat before me in Sunday-school,—the only attentive one in the whole class. For you every Saturday I took out my Bible and text-book and studied carefully the lesson for the ensuing day, that I might be better able to answer intelligently the questions that you might ask me. I am not a member of any church, nor a professing Christian; yet, through my close companion-

ship and friendship with Mr. Bird, whom I knew as a college-mate, I became a regular attendant at his church and Sabbath-school; and at his solicitation took the class. You used to ask me questions I could not answer, owing to my lack of acquaintance with Bible history; and on that account, mainly, I resigned my position as teacher, and recommended that some one more capable and efficient be given it. After I became one of the members of Mr. Bird's class I used often to watch you. I could almost tell what you were saying by the changing expressions of your face. When you were absent I missed you. I became interested in you, and often regretted that my place had been assigned to another. Then that day I saw you crying on your way to school, you looked so sad, so wretched, and unhappy, that I pitied you. Later, when you told me the cause of your trouble, and how the lack of love, sympathy, and harmony made your life at home a burden, I grieved for you, and thought of you so constantly, that, before I was aware, love came to live in my heart, increasing each hour until now it is filled with love for you, and your image is before me waking or sleeping. You can make my future so happy if you will but share it with me. Tell me, does this recital awaken no response in your breast? Can you not begin to think of me in your plans for the future, and associate me with them? Do you not realize what love is, and treasure a little in your heart for me?"

She did not answer him, being overcome with a feeling that seemed more like fear than love.

They had reached her home. On the veranda in front of the house were seated her father and mother

and two women, friends of theirs from a neighboring village: so there was no opportunity for continuing the conversation.

Frank Raynor lifted his hat in recognition of Mr. and Mrs. Patton, as he opened the gate for Irene.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Raynor?" called out Mrs. Patton.

"I think not this evening," he answered, looking inquiringly at Irene.

She did not second her mother's invitation, for she did not want Frank Raynor to talk with vulgar Mrs. Smithers and her daughter; but said only,—

"I want a little time to think over what you have been saying. I cannot now interpret the state of my feelings towards you, they are so different since you have spoken."

"God grant it may be love that you feel, and are not now able to understand!" he said, earnestly, and touching his hat again to the company on the veranda, he walked away.

CHAPTER VIII.

IRENE then spoke to the visitors. She had simply bowed in recognition of them as she stopped in front of the gate.

"You're getting to be quite a young lady, to have such a smart young man as that for a beau," said fat, greasy Mrs. Smithers, shaking her sides in laughter,

as if she had said something very funny. "Purty soon you'll be getting married, fust we know."

"Oh, he is only a friend of the family, not a beau; Irene's too young to think of beaus yet," explained Mrs. Patton. Irene was too much annoyed to make any reply.

"You can go in and eat your supper, Irene. I left the table standing for you; and then do up the dishes when you are through," continued Mrs. Patton.

"Oh, dear!" said Irene, wearily, dropping down on the uppermost step of the veranda, and fanning herself with her hat. She knew what was meant by "leaving the table standing for her,"—a hot room, a cooked supper, and extra dishes on account of the company.

"Oh, dear," unconsciously the words escaped her again, "I am so tired and not a bit hungry."

"Well, then, hurry up with the dishes, and you can rest so much sooner."

There was no other way to do, so she arose, went back to the kitchen, and gathered up the dishes in angry haste.

June, who was out in the back yard lighting fire-crackers with some of the neighbors' children, came in to tell her how she had been to a picnic with the girls next door, and how they had had ice-cream and pop-corn and candy; talking in such an excited manner, as she followed her from the kitchen to the dining-room and back again, that Irene turned on her sharply and said,—

"Stop that everlasting prattle and get out of my way!" when she went meekly and quietly out into the yard again. Irene, reproached by her gentle sub-

mission, was on the point of calling her back when, hearing her merry laugh outside, she knew that the hasty words had already been forgotten, and the child was happier where she was.

With sleeves rolled above her elbows and a huge dark gingham apron tied about her neck and waist, while engaged in washing the dishes, she fell to wondering what Frank Raynor would think of her could he see her thus, red-faced and ill-natured as she was; and became so absorbed that she never noticed Miss Smithers enter the room until, in a loud, coarse voice, she said,—

"I'll dry the dishes for you;" when, starting in affright, she let fall to the floor a glass fruit-dish which she had in her hands, and it was shivered into a myriad of small pieces.

"Oh, dear!" was all she could say, as she heard the hurried, heavy tread of her mother coming through the hallway back into the kitchen.

"It was all my fault, Mrs. Patton," said Miss Smithers. "I didn't mean to, but I frightened her." Mrs. Patton never heeded what she was saying, but, glancing at the broken dish, almost shrieked,—

"My glass fruit-dish! that I've had ever since I was married! You're never satisfied, Irene, unless you're destroying everything you get your hands on. Take that! and that!" she said, ignoring Miss Smithers's presence, and, carried away by her anger, administering two sharp raps with her brawny hands on Irene's ears. "I'll teach you to break my dishes every time you touch them!" Miss Smithers returned to the veranda in haste; but Irene, stung to frenzy with the

pain and humiliation she had been made to suffer on account of the accident, glared at her mother an instant, tossed her head haughtily while untying her work-apron, and, throwing it at her feet, said, in a determined voice,—

"Wash your own dishes hereafter, for I'll never wash another one in this house so long as I live!" Then hurried out of the room, giving the dish-towel, which had fallen to the floor, a contemptuous kick out of her way in passing.

She went to her room, where, locking herself in, she remained, crying and bemoaning her unhappy lot, until, some time after, hearing the gate close, and knowing, from the snatches of conversation that had come up from below through the open window, that the others had gone to another part of the city to witness a display of fireworks, and she was left alone in the house, she brushed back her curls, bathed her face in cool water, and went down-stairs and out on the veranda.

"Let him come now so soon as he wishes; my answer is ready; I will marry him, and escape this life of servitude," she said, as she seated herself in the fading twilight.

The figure of a man stopped hesitatingly in front of the gate soon after, and a low voice said,—

"May I come in, Irene?"

He had come sooner than she had anticipated.

"Oh, Mr. Raynor!" she said, recognizing the voice at once. "Yes, do come in; I am all alone."

"So I thought when I saw the rest of the family and their visitors pass by my window without you, a

little while ago; and I could not make up my mind to remain away, but thought I would just walk by and see if you were home and would like my company."

"Yes; I am so glad you are here now, because—because I was just wishing I could see you. I've been thinking over all you said to me, and I want to tell you that I will be what you have asked, your wife." She spoke with determined and excited earnestness. In an instant his strong arms enfolded her, and he was pressing kisses on her lips.

"Irene, you make me so happy. Some kind spirit must have directed me hither to-night," he said, passionately. She did not respond to his caresses, but, taking out her handkerchief, held it to her eyes a moment.

"You are crying," he said. "Tell me, Irene, for I want to hear you say it,—you love me?"

"Yes, surely I do; and will be happy with you, too, Mr. Raynor,—so much happier than I am now!" Her answer did not satisfy him.

"Have you had any new trouble at home that has brought you to a hasty decision? Answer me frankly and truly."

She hesitated but a moment only,—it was too dark for him to see her face distinctly,—then said,—

"Why do you ask?"

"Only to satisfy myself that no unpleasant experience here at home has led you to a decision that you might hereafter regret when it is too late; because I do not want you to marry me for the sake of escaping an unhappy home-life; such a union could only result in a lifetime of wretchedness. I want your

love; that only will satisfy me. Let me hear you say that you love me?"

"I do love you," she answered him, timidly; "more, much more than any one I know or have ever known."

"That is all I want to know, Irene. If you truly love me, we cannot fail to be happy together," he said; and he lingered by her side, breathing tender words in her ear and talking over plans for their future. She could not understand the compass of the love he portrayed, and tried vainly to imagine her own feeling expanding, with time, into such a volume of affection. She looked up to him as to one beyond her,—above her,—was flattered that he had chosen her to become his wife, and believed this feeling to be all that was required,—a feeling of high esteem and profound respect. When he kissed her lips and spoke rapturously and enthusiastically of their marriage, her position seemed unnatural and her ideas, in reaching after the same joy that he seemed to experience, strained. She listened silently, hearing yet not appreciating what he was saying.

"Of what are you thinking?" he inquired, suddenly, noticing her silent abstraction.

"I?" she questioned, trying to recall what he had last said; "why, I was thinking of how differently I had planned my future, never dreaming of marriage."

"Is it difficult for you to relinquish those plans and reconcile yourself to the change?"

"Difficult? No, perhaps they could never have been realized. I had planned to work them out alone. I had hoped to rise in the world through my own exertions; I saw no other way," she answered him, dreamily.

"But now you will rise just the same, and let me help you and progress with you; we will work together for advancement. It will be better so," he said, earnestly. "A woman alone in the world is a sorry sight; society is thinking always she has no business alone in its midst. The battle of advancement is impeded by many stumbling-blocks; and no matter how capable, how talented she may be, without a sympathetic heart to beat in unison with her own, unless she be undauntable, there is rarely but one result,—discouragement, wavering, and final failure."

What he was saying was interrupted just then by the approach of Irene's parents and June. They came back alone, their visitors having left them to go with other friends.

"Shall I speak to your father and mother now, and seek their approval of our engagement?" Frank inquired, in a low voice.

"Is that necessary?" she answered him.

"It is better to do so, and proper."

"Then wait until to-morrow. Do not speak with them now, please do not," she said, entreatingly. So, after exchanging a few words of greeting with them only, he took his leave; and Irene, anxious to avoid her mother and the questions she was certain to ask, went directly to her room.

The following day Frank Raynor called to seek from Mr. and Mrs. Patton a confirmation of his engagement with Irene. Their surprise at his request may be readily imagined. On Mrs. Patton especially the disclosure of his affection produced a marvellous effect. So great was her surprise that for a few moments

she, who felt in duty bound at all times to act as spokesman for the whole family when any decision was to be arrived at or request granted, was speechless, and her husband, feeling consideration for the embarrassment which he knew Frank must be laboring under on account of the silence, ventured to say,—

"I guess we have no objections, Sarah. If Mr. Raynor wants to marry Irene, and she's willing, I guess we be, eh?"

This outburst of her husband brought her to her senses immediately, and casting a glance of withering reproof on him for daring to give his daughter for the asking, that had its effect in silencing him for the rest of the interview, she said,—

"I don't know as Irene's old enough to think of marrying yet; besides, she haint never sewed a stitch in her life, to speak of, and couldn't make a shirt to save her soul; and as to house-work, why, she don't seem to learn how to do nothing, though goodness knows I've tried to do my duty by her and train her, but she don't seem to take kindly to it nohow. I don't believe now, after all my fussing and trying to learn her, that she could cook a meal of victuals fit to eat!"

Frank could scarcely listen with perfect self-control, and interrupted her by saying, in a grave voice,—

"I do not want your daughter for a servant, I want her for a companion."

Mrs. Patton felt the delicate reproof, but contented herself with saying,—

"Oh, well, if you are able and willing to support her in idleness, why that will just suit her, and I have no objection, but it's more than we can do."

"Then you both consent to our marriage?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Patton, speaking for both, and grasping the hand of each, Frank Raynor thankfully expressed himself satisfied, though he could never afterwards help having a feeling of contempt for Mrs. Patton on account of what she had said of Irene at that interview.

CHAPTER IX.

No time was set for the marriage, but it was tacitly understood that it would take place as soon as Frank's house could be made ready for their reception.

A small diamond in a plain setting glistened on the third finger of Irene's left hand in token of her engagement.

She held out her hand to Minnie Barnes, one morning, that she might notice it.

"Do you know what that means?" she asked.

"No; tell me," answered Minnie.

"It means that I have promised to marry Frank Raynor."

"You marry him!" said Minnie, in evident surprise.

"Yes; why not?" asked Irene, vexed at her manner.

"No reason why you should not, I am sure; only you laughed at me once when I told you he cared for you; and the other day you were going to be such a great artist, with never a thought of marrying."

Minnie was beginning to realize that her friend had

been drifting away from her ever since that day she had brought up the sketches to show to her, and she was much troubled in consequence; besides, she had noticed, at the same time that she had discovered his admiration for Irene, that Frank Raynor evidently disliked her, and she was piqued and not a little annoyed now at the knowledge of the prospective change in her friend's affairs, which promised to drive them further apart. Nevertheless, she pretended to be pleased, and said,—

"I am delighted to hear of your good fortune,—for surely it is a piece of extraordinary good fortune. So many will envy you. And when you are mistress in that lovely house of his, I shall come often to spend whole days with you, won't I?"

Ah! those were the thoughts and expressions that made Irene happier,—not love; and she smiled contentedly as she pictured this change in her life.

"Love? What is love?" she asked herself once. She could not answer. Her heart never quickened its beating at her affianced's approach; she never longed for his coming, nor regretted his absence, as he said he always did hers.

She was always pleased to see him, and sometimes grew a little weary when he stayed too long, and was glad when he went away. She loved better to hear him talk of his plans for improving the house that was to be their future home than to hear him tell of his love for her; and she would rather talk with him when others were about than to be alone with him. He noticed this, but attributed it to her youth and inexperience, not to a want of proper affection; and she explained it to herself by saying that the love of a woman

must be different from the love of a man, or else she was incapable of feeling such strong affection as some did. At any rate, she was satisfied, and what more could be desired?

Time passed swiftly. The news of their engagement became whispered about. Mrs. Patton no longer spoke sharply to Irene, nor found fault with what she would do, but allowed her to pursue her own inclinations without any restraint or rebuke.

They had a servant employed now to do the rough work of the house; Mrs. Patton feeling that a servant was necessary to keep up the dignity of their home since her husband had been made foreman, and Frank Raynor was to be her son-in-law, never willing to acknowledge that it was because her health and strength would no longer allow her to continue, as formerly, in the beaten path. In consequence of all these changes, Irene became almost happy at home.

One evening early in August Frank Raynor was hurrying towards the home of the Pattons full of glad thoughts, as his countenance too plainly betokened. He was always made happier by the prospect of seeing Irene; but that day he had learned that his house would be finished inside of a week, and with this assurance a day could be set for his marriage.

There was no reason for delaying it, because both Irene and himself had decided on a plain and strictly private home ceremony, that was to take place so soon as the house was habitable; and they intended to begin life together at once within its walls. It had needed but few repairs, but some improvements had been added, and now in a week all was to be finished.

Irene's face was radiant as she met him at the door. That she had something new to communicate to him he could read in her eyes, and as soon as they were inside the little parlor she burst forth,—

"We had a letter from my aunt Mollie to-day, and she wants me to come and visit her in New York a little while. She has sent the money necessary to defray my expenses; and mother says I may go, if you have no objection to offer, and are willing I should go,—and you are willing, are you not? Only for a little while," she added, as she noticed a cloud overspread his face. "You see, Aunt Mollie is used to society and gay company, and is so lonesome now, living, as she must, in retirement while in mourning."

"And she wants you to keep her company?" he inquired, gravely.

"Yes, for a little while only."

"But who will keep me company while you are away? I shall be lonely, then, too."

"You do not wish me to go, then?"

"If you want to go, I have no right to object."

"I have never been away from Newbridge since we came here. I would like to see New York very much; only, of course, I should not think of going there if you wished me not to go."

"You would not, Irene," he said, earnestly, his eyes beaming with love for her; "you would not go if I asked you to remain here?" He did not wait for her to answer. "Well, I will not be selfish, and stand in the way of your pleasure for the sake of my own. Go, if you want to, and your parents are willing, and you will not remain from me long."

"I do not know just how long I would be away; but only a little while, of course; for you know I cannot remain long away just now."

"Irene, I cannot bear to think of your leaving me when we have just learned to love each other, and are just beginning to plan for our future together. I dread the hours and days that will intervene until your return; and yet—and yet—you have never been to a city like New York; perhaps it will be pleasant for you to visit a short time there before you assume the duties of married life; and we will go often together after we are wedded. Life is so different there from what it is here. You must not become enraptured with it and want to remain away. Assure me again that you love me truly, promise me that, if you go away, you will not forget me, but will come back soon, very soon,—and be my wife; promise it all over again faithfully." He had grown very much excited while he spoke, and his voice trembled with emotion as he uttered the last sentence.

"Why, Frank, you don't think my going to New York to visit my aunt will make any difference in my feeling for you, do you?"

"I don't know—I don't know; it might. You may not like to come back to Newbridge to live. I am obliged to remain here; my position in business requires it."

"Not come back to Newbridge? Why, even if you did not exist, I should have to come back; my home is here!"

"Yes, I know; but your aunt might want you to remain with her; to make your home with her. Will

you not promise me what I have asked? It will be of so much gratification to me."

"Yes, Frank, I will promise not to forget you, to continue to love you, and to return and be your wife," she said, seriously.

"And soon?" he added.

"And to return to you very soon," she said, laughing lightly as she spoke. "Now are you quite satisfied to have me go?"

"Yes." He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and then talked freely to her about her prospective visit, with many kind words of love and advice interspersing his conversation. He made no mention of the house that was almost ready to receive her. "It will be time enough to speak of that when she returns," he thought.

Yet his peace of mind was much disturbed as he walked homeward that evening; he could scarcely become reconciled, even after having given his consent, to allowing her fair young face to leave his sight, even for a short time.

"She will see a different life there from that to which she has always been accustomed, and meet with different people. Perhaps it is better that she should go; she will doubtless shine in her own home with greater brilliancy for the knowledge she will there glean." So he argued in seeking to console himself.

Irene readily obtained her mother's consent to her paying the visit, after telling her that Mr. Raynor thought it better that she should see a little of life in the East before she married; and a time was set for her to start on the journey just one week from the day on

which the letter had been received, and preparations for the visit were begun.

The little old-fashioned trunk was brought down from the garret, where it had stood so many years undisturbed. The dust was brushed off from its cover, and Irene's clothes packed neatly and carefully away inside.

Radiant with expectancy and enthusiasm, the days intervening before the time of her departure seemed to Irene to drag slowly their unending length along. But for Frank, who vainly attempted to keep up a light heart and cheerful demeanor before her, the time passed swiftly, and the hour of parting came all too soon.

CHAPTER X.

A SAD little trio stood in front of the depot at Newbridge, awaiting the arrival of the east-bound passenger train, on the evening of Irene's departure.

It consisted of her father, her lover, and herself. It was so late in the evening that Mrs. Patton and June had not accompanied them, but had spoken their farewells at the house before she had left; and now that a telegram had been sent to Mrs. Bostwick, and the little trunk had been checked to its destination, the gloom that fell over them was hard to throw off.

"Now you stay in the car until you reach New York; don't you get out once or change into another car," her father said to her for the twentieth time,

as he fidgeted about nervously. It was the first time she had ever gone away from home alone, and he found it difficult to reconcile himself to the idea of her leaving now.

"Yes, papa; I'll do just as you tell me," said Irene, brushing away a tear. The joy of pleasurable anticipation which had brightened life for the past week was swallowed up and forgotten in the pain of parting from home.

She had not believed she would mind leaving so very much. Life there had been stormy and unpleasant ofttimes; but the trials were all forgotten now, and she remembered only what was pleasant.

Her mother had wept as she kissed and bade her good-by. How strange that kiss had seemed, the first she had given her in years! June had clung to her with her arms about her neck and tears in her bright eyes, entreating her not to leave her. Her father's voice trembled more and more each time he repeated the advice just given; and Frank kept her hand on his arm, pressing it firmly with his, as he said, with assumed cheerfulness,—

"You must write to me often, Irene, every day if you will, so I will not miss you so much."

"Yes, Frank," she replied, and the tears she had been striving to keep back fell in spite of her.

"Don't you want to go, darling?" he said.

"Yes, yes, I want to go; but I can't help crying when you all seem to feel so badly; you make me feel sad."

"It is but natural we should feel sorry to lose you, even for so short a time; we will all miss you so much,

though we want you to go, because it will be a pleasant trip, and you will surely enjoy your visit. Is it not so, Mr. Patton?"

"Yes, yes," said John Patton, grasping Frank's hand in his own and shaking it with fervor, as if to thank him for expressing just what he himself wanted to say.

The train steamed in; Irene spoke a hasty good-by to her father, and Frank entered the car with her, saw her seated, kissed her many times hurriedly and passionately, murmuring "God bless you," was gone, and the train was moving on almost before she could realize her situation. She gazed about her in a dazed manner. The porter was engaged in making up the berth in front of her; two men were seated opposite, carrying on a subdued conversation; the curtains hung about, showing where other berths were occupied already. It was all new and strange to her; and she watched with eager curiosity the movements of the porter and passengers that she might see how everything was managed, and not betray ignorance where she could avoid it.

The conductor looked over her tickets, the men opposite went behind the curtains of the berths the porter had just made up, and Irene took the seat they had vacated, while he arranged her section.

When all was in readiness she retired to her couch, but the strangeness of her surroundings, the jolting of the car, and her thoughts of those left behind, all so disturbed her that she could not rest. The train was speeding on its course, putting more miles each hour between her and her home. She drew the sheet up

over her head, and cried softly to herself as she wished she had never left it. So do night-thoughts chase away the desires and longings of the daylight, bringing regret and repentance with them.

Would the daylight never come again? Yes. Worn out with the weariness of over-excitement, she fell asleep at last, and another day had long held sway, and the people all about her were stirring, before she awoke again.

When the long journey was ended and the conductor had passed through the train calling "all out," she took up her satchel and followed the rest of the passengers out of the cars as she had been instructed.

She was much confused by the noise and bustle and the crowds of people on all sides, and with much joy and relief caught sight of her aunt's maid in waiting for her.

"Ah, Miss Irene, I have much pleasure in seeing you here in New York," was Favette's greeting.

"Where is Aunt Mollie?" Irene inquired, eagerly and excitedly.

"She feels not very well, and waits at home to welcome you."

Irene was much impressed by the coachman and footman in livery, and the carriage in waiting for her; but when she reached her aunt's home and received the warm welcome that awaited her, and looked about over the soft carpet, rich rugs, upholstery, furniture, paintings and statuary, the curtains and draperies of silk and lace, the mirrors and costly bric-a-brac, she wondered whether she were awake or dreaming, unable to speak at first, being overcome with the richness and

beauty of her surroundings, so far beyond anything she had ever seen or imagined. Turning her eyes finally towards her aunt, who was sitting near her, looking more beautiful than ever in her mourning robes, and quietly waiting for her to recover from her surprise, Irene impulsively threw herself at her feet, and burying her face in her lap, burst into tears.

"Why, Irene, are you sorry you came?"

"Oh, no, no; I am glad. Glad I am here with you where everything is so lovely," she said, putting both arms about her aunt's neck and kissing her fondly.

"Come, then; don't cry, and I will show you to your room. It is next to mine. I thought you would like that; and you can bathe your face and hands and make ready for breakfast."

It was a beautiful little room into which Mrs. Bostwick ushered her,—all blue and white; curtains of white lace with lambrequins of blue, soft velvet carpet of blue and white, with white fur rugs scattered about, and a little bed in one corner with draperies of blue and white; a dream of fairyland it seemed to Irene. Her aunt sat down in one of the low chairs, talking rapidly to her all the while she made a hasty toilet.

"It was so nice of you to come to me, my dear, and we will have a nice little visit together. That is a very pretty travelling suit you have on. Did your mother make it for you?"

"Yes," answered Irene, glancing down at the plain gray costume, dusty from travel, and wondering what her aunt saw that was pretty about it.

"I had no idea she could succeed half so well. But you show off the dress, of course, and you will look

charming in some of my dresses when they are made over to suit you, for I am going to have them made over for you. I can wear them no longer on account of being in mourning, and they will be all out of date before long, so just as soon as I knew you were coming, I engaged three sewing-women to come here and begin work on them at once. You see, we will go to Long Branch next week to remain a while, and although we will live very quietly there, I want you to be well dressed all the time, and, of course, you have nothing now that will be suitable."

"Are you going to visit at Long Branch?" inquired Irene, regretting that they were to leave the city so soon.

"Oh, no; we will live there a few weeks in Mrs. Frothingham's cottage. She is in Europe now, and has placed it at my disposal for the season."

"Would you not rather live here in New York than there?" inquired Irene.

"Dear me, no! everybody goes to the seaside or country in the summer. I should have been away long ago myself, only—— There is the breakfast-bell! Come! are you ready? We will go down, then, at once, for you must be very hungry." And, putting an arm about her niece's waist, she led her down-stairs.

As they entered the breakfast-room, a gentleman advanced to greet them.

"This is your cousin Robert, Irene," said Mrs. Bostwick, introducing him.

Irene had forgotten that her aunt had a son, not hearing her speak of him; and, as he held out his hand towards her, she placed her own within it, though unable to speak a word to him. He smiled pleasantly,

saying he was happy to welcome her into their little family, and placed a seat at the table for her. She thanked him in a low voice, glancing up into his face, only to drop her eyes hastily again on her plate upon meeting his looking kindly and admiringly on her. It seemed to her as if the meal would never come to an end. Both her aunt and her cousin tried to engage her in conversation by talking freely and easily of what they thought would interest her, yet without avail. She was vexed at her stupidity, and tried to overcome the embarrassment under which she was laboring; but, somehow or other, she could think of nothing but her plain gray dress, so out of keeping with the luxurious surroundings, and finally, upon making a quick nervous movement of her hand, she overturned the cup of coffee at her side, its contents spreading in a muddy blot upon the white cover of the table. Tears came to her eyes then, and looking plaintively towards her aunt, she begged to be excused, and hurried from the room.

"I've frightened her, mother," said Robert, as she closed the door behind her.

"Yes; she was not expecting to meet you here, I guess; I had forgotten to speak of you. Besides, I should not wonder if she were a little homesick. I believe it is the first time she has been away from home alone."

"Homesick! so soon! I hope not. She is like a beautiful doll. It would be delicious if we could have her with us always."

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say so; it is my own idea. I think I will follow her, or she will cry herself

sick alone." And, rising from the table, Mrs. Bostwick went in search of her.

Before a week had passed, Irene had entirely recovered from any feeling of embarrassment in her cousin's presence and was able to talk to him with the ease of old acquaintance.

Her time was so taken up by him and her aunt and the sewing-women that she found little time to write to her lover. She had promised to write a letter every day; but there had been so much to look at and to talk about, and so many things to be accomplished before they should leave for Long Branch, that she could not find the time. She had written this to him by way of apology, and suppressing the disappointment he experienced, he tried to comfort himself with the thought that she was happy and enjoying herself. A portion of the third letter he received from her, however, caused him much uneasiness. It read:

"I have seen but very little of New York, after all, Aunt Mollie tells me. We have only driven out in a close carriage early in the morning or before sundown in the evening. She says almost every one is away at the seashore or in the country this time of the year; but when we return from Long Branch, where we are going to-morrow to spend a few weeks, we will go about much more, and attend the theatres and opera, and visit the art galleries, and every other place of interest worth seeing here."

A few weeks at the seaside, and return to the city when fashionable life began there!—he knew how

long that meant. Was it possible that she could remain away from him all that time? When she went away it was for a month only; and here she was planning for three months at least. It was difficult for him to reconcile himself to this change in the original plan; and he paced the floor excitedly, wrote twice and thrice a reply in anger, and each time tore it into pieces. He finally decided to ignore that part of her letter which foreshadowed a longer visit than she had planned, and to write as calmly and as lovingly as had been his wont, not referring in any way to the time of her coming back, but trusting to her heart to dictate a speedy return.

"Surely, if she loves me truly, even one-tenth part as much as I love her, she will not be able to remain away from my side so long as she now anticipates," he argued.

So he wrote cheerfully a long epistle, telling her he was pleased to know of her enjoyment of her surroundings, and that he wished he might be with her, to be made happy by seeing her pleasure; and many other things he wrote, such as only one who loves sincerely, and is separated from the object of his affection, will think of writing; and he asked at the close of his letter whether she had told her aunt and cousin of their engagement.

Yes, Irene had told her aunt about her engagement and plans for the future, the day after her arrival, when Mrs. Bostwick had noticed the little diamond on her finger, and asked its meaning; and she had frowned and said,—

"It is unfortunate; you are too young yet to think

of marriage. Mr. Raynor, did you say? Any connection of the Raynors of Boston? The same family? ah! How did it come about? Once they were the first people of Boston. Rich, too; but the old man foolishly speculated,—he should have known better,—and lost everything. The daughter married Mr. Chillingworth, who is very rich and highly respected. But this brother,—I have not heard of him. Is he rich or poor? He is of good family; but, my dear child, you might do better by waiting, and have as good family and money besides. How did it all come about? Tell me. But, of course, he fell in love with your pretty face. A prince might do the same, and make you a princess. And you think of marrying this fall, too? Nonsense, child; you don't know what you are about. Wait awhile. See more of the world and people. If he loves you he will be willing to wait, and you may be able to do better. Certainly you will lose naught by waiting."

The words sank deep in Irene's breast. Many times afterwards she pondered over them as she saw her cousin's eyes smiling down into hers, thinking that perhaps her aunt was right, after all, and deciding to be in no hurry to marry, but to enjoy a little longer the freedom of single life. That she still loved Frank Raynor as much as she was capable of loving any one, she never doubted for a moment. But city life was enchanting to her, and her cousin was most agreeable and entertaining. She wanted to remain free a little longer.

She did not write this, nor what her aunt had advised, to Frank. Her instinct told her it would not be wise.

But one afternoon, in the cottage at the seaside, when she was putting on her gloves before going out to drive with her aunt and cousin, she quietly withdrew the little ring from her finger, and put it away in her trunk.

Foolish Irene!

CHAPTER XI.

"COUNT BEAURYNSKI is the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bolingbroke, at their cottage at Long Branch."

So the society papers told the world.

And he was seen driving out almost daily with them in their family carriage. Once they met and passed a carriage drawn by a pair of dappled gray horses, whose occupants were a trio of fair people,—a young man, a beautiful woman in deep mourning, and a young girl in creamy white, her lovely face radiant with evident enjoyment of her surroundings, partly concealed by the lace falling from the cream white parasol which she carried low above it.

The occupants of each carriage bowed in mutual recognition as they passed. Count Beaurynski started forward as he raised his hat.

"Ah, pardon, madame; who may that lady be?"

"Who just passed?" inquired Mrs. Bolingbroke.

"Yes, yes," said the count, impatiently.

"Why, that is Mrs. Bostwick, widow of Robert Bostwick, formerly a prominent member of the Stock Exchange. We do not meet her in society, as she is in mourning."

"Ah, yes; but the other; the younger one in white?"

"Oh, that is—I am not certain—her niece, I think; I have never met her. She is very beautiful, I think."

"Ah, divine!" said the Count, enthusiastically.

"I will find some way of introducing her to you," said his hostess. She called on Mrs. Bostwick the following day, met Irene, and invited her to drive with her. Irene was much flattered to find herself seated in Mrs. Bolingbroke's carriage, the Count Beaurynski opposite, riding about Long Branch. She was not insensible to the many glances of admiration bestowed upon her by the occupants of passing carriages; in truth, she had many times before noticed them, and the consciousness of being the object of such marked attention and evident admiration was very gratifying to her.

"Can any one tell me who the young lady is that was out driving with Mrs. Bolingbroke and Count Beaurynski, yesterday?" inquired one of a group of young ladies on the veranda of the West End Hotel, one afternoon. No one made answer.

"Well, it seems strange," the speaker continued, "that though everybody is talking of her and admiring her beauty, and she is in receipt of the Count Beaurynski's distinguished attention, no one knows who she is, or anything about her."

"A protégée of Mrs. Bolingbroke's, perhaps," said one.

"A poor relation of hers, more likely," said another.

"I have seen her frequently on the drive with Mrs. Bostwick. She may be a friend of hers."

"Ah, ladies, shall I tell you who your fair competi-

tor is?" said a young man, standing just outside of the group. He had been talking with them a moment before, and was still near enough to overhear what they were saying.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Wells, please do enlighten us, if you can," they answered, grouping about him.

"Well, I think I can, as I see her every day," he said, slowly. "She is Mrs. Bostwick's niece, from somewhere in the West. A charming young woman, too, who paints with decided skill and much originality. I take great pleasure, each day, in spending regularly two hours in her society, instructing her a little in my art."

"Happy man," said the tallest of the group, in mocking tone.

"I did not know you gave instruction in your art," said another.

"I do not, as a rule. I lack the patience, time, and disposition; but Robert Bostwick and I are old friends. He wanted me to give his cousin a few hints for improvement, which I did most willingly, as I would do anything for him that lies in my power."

"Two hours each day! Will you not lose your heart in such generous consideration for your friend?" said a handsome brunette.

"I? Oh, no. There is not the slightest chance of that; she has no thought for any one but her fair cousin, nor he for any other but herself. Besides, she evidently looks on me as a plodding teacher of my art, and so receives me. Her manner pleases me; but she paints admirably and makes rapid improvement. If she continues as she has begun, I think I will be proud some time to know I was her first instructor."

"Indeed!" said another of the group, who had not spoken heretofore. "But who is she? What is her name? Who are her people?"

"Her name is Irene Patton"——

"Ah, there she comes, now, with Mrs. Bostwick," interrupted the brunette, and they all turned to look at an approaching carriage, drawn by dappled gray horses. At the same moment, a gentleman approached with whom the artist was acquainted, and, excusing himself, he walked away in his company without another word.

Rupert Wells, the gentleman who had thus volunteered to furnish information regarding Irene, although still a young man, was a renowned artist. He painted with ease and great skill from nature, and his pictures sold for enormous sums. Yet, although his name was known to every admirer or patron of art, it was not known to Irene.

In her Western home, with limited opportunities for communication with the outside world, and knowing but little of art or artists through the medium of the daily papers at Newbridge,—almost the only papers she ever saw,—she had never seen even his name in print, or, if she had, had not remembered it.

So, when Robert Bostwick had introduced him to her as his friend, saying that he was an artist, and had consented to look at the picture she was then painting and give her a few suggestions, she thought him probably one of the numerous teachers from the city.

But she was glad to have him look over her work; and, as he added a touch here and there, with her permission, she recognized the experienced stroke of the

artist at once, for her plain sketch brightened, took on a new light, and seemed more lifelike in appearance. She was filled with enthusiasm at the sight.

"Oh, if I might have you to show me every day, I feel sure I could improve rapidly!" she exclaimed, unconsciously clapping her hands together as she watched him. "Why, see! The picture is no longer mine, but yours; you have changed and improved it so much!"

"Ah, but I had some good work to improve. What is the sketch?"

"I do not know; it is but a copy, enlarged from a picture I saw once in a book. I drew the outline and supplied the color according to my own understanding of what it should be. The one I copied was in black and white; but I was anxious to try a landscape,—so experimented with this."

"How long since you first began painting?"

"Only this spring to amount to anything, though I have dabbled in colors at odd times for two years past."

"Who was your instructor?"

"I have received but little instruction,—what was given me by the drawing-teacher in school. I began so late to work in earnest that I have not had time to progress. But, if I could only have you to direct me, I think I could."

"And so do I," said Mr. Wells, earnestly; "so much am I inclined to think so that I've half a mind to bring an easel over by the side of yours, with your aunt's and your permission, and not idle away the few weeks I am here, as I intended, but devote an hour or two each day to my own improvement, and yours."

"Oh, if you only would!" She grasped his hand in hers, in her earnest approval of this plan and eagerness that he should carry it out.

Her manner was new to him; so frank and honest it was, so free from all the insincerity and affectation that he saw so much of in life, that she interested him. He had been watching the expression of her face as she talked, and, looking through her eyes into her heart, had read her soul's purpose aright: a burning ambition to execute something of merit and worth in art. He felt that it would be a pleasure and a pastime to teach her; the experience would be a novel one; and then he would, as he had said, bring over his own easel, and, while he gave her hints for improvement, would himself make sketches from her pretty face in all its flitting and varied expressions; and would use one of them in a great picture he was working on in his studio.

The arrangement was made, to the great satisfaction of all interested; and each day, between ten and twelve in the morning, the two could be found in a little room at the back of the cottage which looked out on the sea busily engaged with their work. Sometimes they were entirely alone, at other times Mrs. Bostwick would bring a book and sit by the window near them and read; then ofttimes her son neglected to take the early train for the city, as was his custom, and made one of the little group also, talking with gay freedom to the artist, while lingering near the easel of Irene.

Rupert Wells watched the pair with interest. He saw the face of his young pupil brighten at her cousin's

approach, and a faint flush overspread her fair countenance whenever he ventured to praise her sketch.

Yes; there was no doubt of it. His old college-chum and dear friend was becoming hopelessly entangled in love's meshes, and was winning the heart of his cousin almost away from her occupation.

Something he noticed, too, which his young pupil and friend were too preoccupied to observe;—a look of displeasure and annoyance overspread the face of Mrs. Bostwick as she marked the growing affection of the pair for each other.

And why should she be annoyed? She loved her niece and her son? Oh, yes; as much as her poor selfish nature could care for any one besides herself; and she sincerely wished for their happiness, but, to her mind, true happiness could never be secured in life without money,—and plenty of it. Poverty meant privation, self-denial, and consequent misery and wretchedness; and, in looking over the accounts of her late husband after his death, she had found but little left of the large fortune he had once possessed,—so little, indeed, that it would not support her long in the manner of living to which she had grown accustomed. So she hoped that her son might make a wealthy alliance, knowing that she could always count on having a home with him, and of sharing any success or good fortune that might attend him; and she had long hoped to have Mrs. Frothingham's niece—a very wealthy heiress—for a daughter-in-law. She was abroad now with her aunt, but before they had gone away everything seemed to favor this prospect. The young people were apparently fond of each other's society, and Mrs.

Frothingham had even talked with her about their attachment for each other in such a way as to show that she also entertained a hope of their union. He was just starting out in life, too, in a profession that has so many followers, and whose records show so many failures. Supported by wealth, he might soon secure patronage and make such headway as would establish his position among its leading representatives in a short time; but for one accustomed to wealth and luxury just beginning in a profession, lack of money was sure to be a very serious drawback. She was even keeping up the appearance of continued wealth and affluence before the world as long as she might, with the view of advancing her son's interests in business and matrimony, hoping that, before she had exhausted what yet remained of her husband's fortune, success in both might be attained; and now he was about to wreck all her plans by falling in love with a girl having not a particle of influence in society, and no dowry save her beauty.

She looked forward with horror to a life outside of the world she had known since girlhood, deprived of the luxuries that had become necessities with her; and she was vexed with herself for ever having put temptation in her son's way by inviting Irene to her home. For certain it was that Irene, who looked never so beautiful as now, in fashionable and becoming attire, falling into all the ways and habits of her surroundings as though she had been all her life accustomed to them,—lovely Irene, who was attracting more attention and winning more hearts by her simple grace, charming expression, and the fascination of her unconscious

manners than ever she had done in her younger days, —was thwarting all her plans and frustrating all her hopes, by falling in love with, and winning the heart of, her son.

She had sent for her to come and visit her because she admired her pretty face, and wanted to have it near her. She never stopped to reason that as a bird of brilliant plumage attracts the eye of all alike who may discover it, or the spring bursting from the ground by the wayside is welcomed with equal joy by every thirsty passer-by, even so the charms of Irene would be felt by one who met her frequently.

To expostulate was to move a brand on a sleeping flame that the draft might impart to it new life; but she continued to frown while she watched them, and waited in a vain hope that this fascination—as she called it—would wear itself out. Finally, one day she argued with her son, in private, against the foolish course he was pursuing, and the disastrous mistake he was making.

He listened attentively until she had finished, and, after weighing the subject in his mind, came to the conclusion that she was right, and determined to avoid Irene's society thereafter, until he had stifled this feeling that had sprung up in his breast for her. He went regularly into the city every day before she was up thereafter, returning late in the evenings, and carefully avoiding the studio. But his work went wrong all the while. He was writing her name in his letters; her face was before him in his imagination, and his thoughts were on her instead of on his work. He could eat nothing with relish. Life was

without pleasure or comfort for him, and, just as Mrs. Bostwick was about to congratulate herself on her successful and timely interference, he gave up the struggle against his heart's inclinations, and was back in the studio by Irene's side, more constant and devoted in his attentions than ever before.

And Irene all the while was neglecting her betrothed and falling in love with her cousin, without realizing the true state of her feelings. She attributed the new joy and happiness she experienced since coming into her aunt's home to the change of scene; to the beautiful and luxurious surroundings; to the drives and the dresses; to the flowers she received from her cousin and the Count; to the attentions and open admiration paid to her; to her success in painting,—to everything that she had known, in fact, since she had come hither that she had never known at home, save the true cause and reason,—love. So subtle is the influence of love! Like the sun, spreading its radiance over all the earth, in all climes, among all sorts and conditions of men; instilling new life into all who bask in its rays.

The sunlight steals so silently into your home that you would never know that it had come until made aware of its presence as the room grows warmer, the walls look brighter, and you see where its path lies across the floor. It came in unbidden at an open door or window, or through a crevice in the wall, and you go singing about your work because it is there. You may turn your back on its brightness, close the door and window, stop up the crevice, and seek to live on happy without it, but the color will leave your cheek; your heart will be heavy; your voice will grow harsh;

your disposition will become crabbed and sour; the charm will have gone out of your life; and unhappiness and discontent sit down on each side of you. You cannot shut the sunlight out of your life, and be happy, after once having felt its power; and if you know all the while that it is outside waiting to be admitted, no longer able to endure without its gentle solace, you will run out into the open air and turn your face towards its source until your eyes are dazzled, blinded almost, by its brightness.

Shine on, life-giving sun! The birds sing all the day long in thy radiance. The night-bird alone comes forth when thou no longer dost brighten the earth, and hoots in unmelodious tone, doubtless, because it does not know thee.

The child plays in thy beams with happy laugh; youth brightens and hopes, middle age endures with patience, old age is strengthened, because of thy light.

Is it not so with love?

When Irene became conscious that Frank Raynor's image was being crowded out of her heart by another dearer to her than his, she was frightened at first, yet made no effort to reinstate it, and finally grew happy and contented in her cousin's companionship, forgetful of every promise to the true heart away in Newbridge that was anxiously watching for her letters, and waiting for her return, dreaming only of her face all the while.

"Leave landscapes," the artist said to Irene, one morning, "and try faces. You have a correct eye and careful touch. You might excel in that department."

She did as he advised, and, coming into the little

studio one morning before her, Rupert Wells found the outlines of his friend's features on her easel.

Ah! Frank Raynor, there is a greater distance than miles coming between you and your heart's idol. The distance is widening each hour. Arouse yourself! Call her back to you before it is too late! Your home is waiting to shelter your chosen bride! If you permit it to wait much longer it will be desolate!

CHAPTER XII.

One afternoon, early in October, Frank Raynor entered his apartment on Grand Street, and, with an air of despondency, took off his coat and waistcoat, and threw himself upon the bed.

With both hands underneath his head and eyes intently fixed upon the ceiling, he gave himself up disconsolately to his thoughts. He had felt too ill to continue his work at the office that afternoon; so, leaving earlier than was his custom, sought relief in the solitude of his room. Quiet was all he required, he was certain; yet the longer he remained there alone the more intensely he suffered. His head seemed bursting, and disturbing thoughts would come, in spite of all effort to keep them away.

"Just two months to-day since Irene went away! When will she return?" That perplexing and constantly-recurring question disturbed him, and the answer, "Never, never, never," seemed to repeat itself

with every heart-beat. She had promised to write to him every day. Now it had been a week since he had heard from her. In her last letter she had told him of the drives she had taken about Long Branch; the pleasant people she had met; her painting, and how rapidly she was progressing. She had told him also of her meeting with, and the attention she had received from, the distinguished foreigner, Count Beaurynski; and many other incidents of her life at the seaside she had written of, but not one word about coming home,—and no reference did she make to their marriage.

She had promised to write every day, and had written but twice a week before that,—such letters as had brought but little comfort to his lonely, aching heart.

Twice he had walked deliberately down to her father's house, intending to beg of her parents to send for her and compel her to return; but when he reached the gateway he had gone by without stopping, feeling contempt for himself for having entertained for a moment such a selfish purpose. No! no! Rather than ask this favor from such a source, he would battle with his feelings and await her voluntary return, or, if needs be, himself entreat her to come back.

A light rap so startled him that he bounded from the bed to the floor with a leap that shook the walls of the room. When he opened the door he discovered his friend, Marshall Bird, who had a room adjoining his, and who held out a letter to him, saying,—

"I was not sure you were at home, but ventured to rap and see. I just took this for you from the postman."

"Thank you; thank you!" said Frank, excitedly, taking the letter with trembling hands, and recognizing Irene's familiar handwriting. "I came home early; was not feeling well. Come in, Marshall, come in!"

"No; thank you, Frank. I have noticed that you haven't been looking well for some time past, old friend. I am afraid you are working beyond your strength. You ought to take a vacation. You need rest. I'll tell you what it is,—I am going to New York, about the last of the month, to meet my parents and sister on their return from Europe. You had better go with me. The change would do you good."

"No, thank you; I'll be all right in a day or so. I would rather not leave just then," he said, thinking that Irene would have returned by that time.

"You ought to go there or somewhere else. Think it over, at any rate. You may change your mind meanwhile." And, closing the door, the minister left him to himself.

He tore open the letter in a sort of frenzied haste. It contained one little, single sheet, only partly filled, beginning, "Dear Friend," and saying, by way of apology for not having written before, that she had been going about so much, and had put off writing from day to day until a week had passed before she was aware. She had been having some pictures taken. When they were finished she would send him one. With such matter and in such a manner was the letter filled, and signed, "Lovingly, Irene."

He held it away from him and looked at it in a dazed manner, then brought it closer and read it over

again; then, contemptuously tearing it into pieces, he cast its fragments about him on the floor, walked over to his desk, and wrote excitedly page after page a letter in reply, which he folded, placed in an envelope, sealed, stamped, and addressed to Irene, without even reading it over. Then, donning his coat and hat, he went out into the street and dropped it into the first post-box he came to, and, retracing his steps to his room, turned the key in the latch, and did not emerge again that evening.

The house-maid rapped at the door to call him to supper, but he made no reply. All that night he tossed about in a fever of anxiety, unable to obtain any rest. He had believed that he possessed Irene's heart before she went away from him. Now he was beginning to doubt it. Life there was offering to her more attraction than she could find at home, and was keeping her away from him. A myriad of cold, calculating, disinterested hearts out there in the world were winning her away from one true heart in Newbridge. He had never spoken of her return in any of his letters, trusting that the dictates of her heart would bring her to his side of her own accord. And now he had written asking her to choose at once between him and the world.

He had meant to be gentle, but had grown intense as he wrote, the remembrance of the short, indifferent letters he had received from her spurring him on until what he had intended to be a gentle remonstrance was instead a sarcastic reproof.

In the morning, when he was calmer, he regretted that he had been so severe, and promised himself to

write a penitent letter to her as soon as he arrived at his office.

Pale and haggard, he went his way thither, nodding in indifferent recognition to those whom he met with whom he was acquainted. Out in the world, the little world of Newbridge, the gossips had long been talking over his affairs, having noticed, with much surprise, his changed appearance, his careworn features, and his withdrawal from the society which he had formerly frequented.

His engagement with Irene was generally known, and commented on with disfavor by many of his acquaintances. Now, as they noted the change that had come over him, and at the same time her prolonged absence, they discoursed in such a manner about him as would have made him furious could he have known what they were saying. But he never knew. We rarely do hear the ill that is said about us. The friend who would be kind fears to offend by telling us; and so, what has its birth ofttimes in the imagination of some unscrupulous person in time becomes accepted as a fact.

As he walked towards the office that morning, with his mind full of sorrow and self-reproach, he passed Minnie Barnes on her way to school. She was walking slowly, engrossed in reading a letter as she went along. He disliked her, scarcely knowing why; yet he spoke pleasantly to her in passing, because she was Irene's friend.

"Oh, Mr. Raynor, is that you?" she said. "I have just received and have been reading a long letter from Irene."

He stopped, and, glancing at the letter, saw that it was much longer than the one he had received.

"Indeed!" he answered. "What does she have to say?"

"As if you did not know, when, of course, you hear from her four or five times a week, no doubt, while this is the first letter I have received from her in three weeks!"

"How does she write to you?" he inquired, not seeming to heed what she was saying.

"I wonder if I can make him jealous!" thought Minnie, as she answered,—

"Oh, she says she is having a glorious time! And she says the Count Beaurynski,—by the way, wasn't it romantic how he sought to be introduced to her? I should think she would feel highly complimented! I know that I should! But, then, it is not strange that he noticed her; she is so very beautiful that every one admires her."

Frank, walking by her side, dropped into her pace.

"What did she say of the Count Beaurynski in this letter?" he inquired, trying to ask the question carelessly, but failing utterly.

"He is jealous already," thought Minnie. "If I could only win him from her!" And she continued,—

"Oh, she says the Count calls almost every day at her aunt's house in the city, and sends her such beautiful flowers!"

"And what else?" His words had such a cold, hard sound that Minnie looked up in affright, thinking she had ventured too far.

"Oh, nothing else but just gossip about her pleas-

ures and pastimes, and her paintings, and so on. She tells you all about everything, of course? Oh, she told me not to let you get lonesome while she was away, lest you should want her to come back before she is ready to come,—as if I could keep you from missing her! I miss her myself so much that I wish she would return at once."

"And so do I," said Frank, heartily, adding, "I must leave you here, as our roads lie apart. Good-morning."

"Don't get lonesome," said Minnie, smiling up in his face bewitchingly as he left her.

He could make no answer; his heart was too full; but silently lifted his hat and pursued his way. His soul was in torment. A new feeling—jealousy—was struggling for a place in his breast. He tried to thrust it back, but it forced its way against his will, and found food there to strengthen it in the recollection of the short, unsatisfactory communications he had been receiving from Irene,—those letters that should have been so full of loving consideration for his loneliness instead.

Ah me! what a great smoke a little fire makes.

The letter he meant to write in apology for that of the day before was never written.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was the second time the Count Beaurynski had ever visited the United States. He was a Russian, tall, handsome, of dark complexion, with black hair and eyes, and he was very rich, and of excellent family. With honest pride he looked back over his ancestry, in the knowledge that no fault of theirs, either public or private, could cause him to blush for the title he bore.

His two sisters and his mother were living. One of his sisters had married an English lord; the other was the wife of the Russian ambassador at England. His mother lived with the latter; and he, the only male representative of the family, was thirty-three years of age, and unmarried.

He had come to America intending to spend a little time in and about New York, thence to travel through the Western States, and in the fall to start from the Pacific coast on an extended trip around the world. In London, the season before, he had met and known intimately and favorably Mr. and Mrs. Bolingbroke, and, while in New York, had accepted their invitation to spend a few days with them at their cottage at Long Branch. Many entertainments were given there in his honor, and several young women of wealth and culture were presented to him who were ready to lay their hearts at his feet.

To all this apparent homage he remained stolidly indifferent, and at the receptions, teas, and entertain-

ments, wherever he lent his presence, would look about continually and anxiously for a sight of the fair, girlish face that had once attracted him on the drive, and that had since sat opposite to him in the same carriage, —a face that flushed whenever he addressed its owner; a face that had never thrust itself upon his notice at any time, but which he had to seek after. When he had learned that it would not be seen at any of the entertainments to which he was invited, he ceased to attend them himself.

And he lingered at Long Branch.

Every day he mounted his horse and galloped past Mrs. Frothingham's cottage, and was repaid for his journey and made happier when chance gave him a glimpse of the one he was hoping to see,—Irene.

He sent her magnificent bouquets of flowers frequently; and when the season came to a close he went back to the city and registered at a prominent hotel, unable to overcome his desire to see often and talk with her, and became an almost daily visitor at her aunt's home.

"The Count is becoming hopelessly entangled; surely you may be a Countess if you wish. I think he will offer himself before long, and, if he does, you will never refuse him, of course?" said Mrs. Bostwick to Irene, after one of his visits.

"Nonsense, Aunt Mollie! He never thinks of such a thing; and, even if he should offer himself, I would certainly never accept him!"

"You would be mad not to encourage him,—a nobleman, and rich as he is, too! Are you so much in love at home?"

"No, no! That is not the reason; but I do not care to marry any one," Irene answered; and, without another word, arose and went hurriedly out of the room.

Mrs. Bostwick was annoyed. "Yes; there is one you would marry," she said to herself. "Only that must not be."

The Count was assuredly in love with Irene. In vain he had tried to dispute with himself as to the true state of his feelings. Three times he had ordered his trunks packed and made arrangements for continuing his journey, and three times, at the last moment, he had changed his mind, being unable to leave New York while she was there, and he could see her.

Many times he thought over and discarded the idea of bestowing his name on an obscure American, knowing with what disfavor his proud mother and sisters would look upon such an alliance. And yet,—and yet he hesitated, less each time. Why not, if her family were gentle people?

Who were her people, anyhow? He had never been able to learn anything about them. Irene had once said her home was in Newbridge. He decided finally to write there and make inquiry, or, better still, to send his trusted servant to discover all he might be able about her. If the family were poor even, but not of common blood, and there was no disgrace attached to their name, he would forthwith seek her hand in marriage, no matter what the world or his family might think or say.

* * * * * * *

Frank Raynor was seated in his private office, one afternoon late in October, looking over and wearily

making memoranda from some letters which were spread out on the desk in front of him. The window was open at his side, and a chilling breeze came through, bearing with it the light rustle of the dead leaves it loosened from the branches of a huge walnut-tree that grew near.

He was alone, and greatly changed from the happy man of three months ago. He looked ill. His cheeks were sunken, a deadly pallor was over his countenance, and his dark eyes seemed staring about in suspicious and restless inquiry. He was very nervous, too, and started at every sound like a person guilty of some crime. Even the rustle of the falling leaves disturbed him, for the sound kept fresh in his mind the flight of the days.

It was now almost two weeks since he had written to Irene begging her to return to him, and he had elicited no reply.

He could not understand the meaning of her prolonged silence. Each day he walked home with a quickened step that he might the sooner receive the letter that must surely await him there; and each time returned with languid pace, as if the hurry had exhausted him. His appetite failed him. He could eat nothing with relish when doubt and dissatisfaction were thus preying upon him; and as he sat there this afternoon, leaning his head upon his hand, forgetful of the work before him, he seemed wavering between hope and despair.

The door opened, and one of the men from the adjoining office handed him a card, saying, "The gentleman is waiting outside."

Mechanically he read the name, "Henry Blake." It was strange to him. He rose and began arranging his papers, and, closing his desk, said calmly to the clerk, who was waiting, "Show him in."

He had never seen the man before, but strangers called on him frequently; so he was not surprised at meeting this one, and motioned him silently to a seat, while waiting for him to state his errand.

"Are you Mr. Frank Raynor?" began the stranger, consulting a slip of paper he held in his hand, as if for reference.

"I am," replied Frank, betraying no little impatience.

"May I inquire whether you are acquainted with a family living here in this city by the name of Patton?"

Frank was perceptibly startled, but replied, as calmly as he was able,—

"If you refer to the family of John Patton,—yes."

"I am not sure whether that is the name; but the one I mean has a daughter, visiting at present in New York." Frank was now quite visibly excited.

"Why do you inquire? Who sent you to me?" he demanded, imperatively.

"I do not know the name of the man that directed me here, not being acquainted in this place. I have only just arrived from the East, and the ticket-agent at the station, of whom I first made inquiries, sent me to you, saying that you could tell me all about the family, as you knew them well."

As Frank listened a cold chill crept over his body. He began to fear some harm had befallen Irene.

"Do you know the daughter, Irene?" he inquired.

"No, I have not that honor."

"Then who are you? and what is it you want to know?"

The man was an excellent valet, but a blundering detective. "You have my card," he said. "I wish only to learn all I may about the family and connections of Irene Patton."

"And wherefore?" inquired Frank, with evident suspicion in his manner.

"For no dishonorable purpose, sir," the man responded, haughtily. "Is it a crime to inquire into the history of a family living in the city one may visit? I see you do not wish to aid me, so, if you will pardon my intrusion, I will take my leave." He arose as he said this, and made a move as if about to depart.

"No, stay a moment!" remonstrated Frank. "I meant no harm by what I said, believe me; only it seemed odd that you should come so far to inquire. I know the family well, very well. Only be kind enough to answer me one question,—Why have you come here to learn about them, when you might have obtained from the daughter or her aunt in New York all the information you can possibly glean by coming here, and have thus spared yourself a long journey?"

"I am acting not on my own responsibility, but by the direction of another; therefore, I cannot reply," the man answered.

"Will you answer me one more question, a fair one, as I am much interested in the family, being, I may say, almost related to them,—Who sent you hither to inquire?"

The man hesitated for a moment, while he pondered

over in his mind what would be best for him to answer. It was a new business to him that he was now engaged in, and he was clumsy at the best. However, he argued to himself, "The Count did not impose the least secrecy upon me; there can be no harm in telling, and I may thereby the sooner learn what I have come to find out, and get away from this beastly town." So he replied, after a short pause,—

"The Count Beaurynski!"

"What!" almost shrieked Frank Raynor, springing from the chair on which he had been sitting, overturning it as he did so, and darting towards the stranger as if he would clutch him by the throat and strangle him for speaking the name. The man stepped back out of his way hastily, wondering if he had blundered, when Frank, recovering himself, besought his pardon in a way that reassured him.

"You know the Count?" he inquired, cautiously.

"No, I do not know him; I have heard of him only, that is all,—that is all," Frank explained.

"He is of excellent family and an honorable gentleman," the man went on to say.

"Yes, yes; no doubt," Frank added, hastily. Thoughts of Irene and Count Beaurynski had for some time been disturbing him, until within the last few days he had almost made himself believe that in the Count he had a formidable rival and that he was stealing Irene's heart away from him; and this thought, augmented by her long silence, gained confirmation in his mind the more he brooded over it. The name of the Count Beaurynski in company with Irene's was coursing through his brain day and night, making him almost

insane with jealousy. No wonder he started away from himself on hearing it pronounced so inauspiciously by this stranger. Why should he want to know of Irene's people if he was indeed an honorable gentleman, as this man had said, but with an intention of making her his wife if her antecedents and family were not objectionable? and knowing with what contempt titled foreigners looked upon the working class, and what their aristocratic requirements were of the families into which they married, he thought that Fate was kind to throw this man in his way.

The reason why Irene had not answered his letter was obvious enough, to be sure. He had asked her to accept or discard him, to return to him or to release him,—seeking rather to be released from any vestige of hope than suffer the agony of doubt he had been enduring.

But she had not written; she had not released him; she was doubtless waiting for the Count to propose to her before she cast him aside,—willing to marry him if she could not secure this nobleman,—and she had kept him waiting all the time in consequence; while he—he—had been a deluded fool! He paced the floor excitedly, not heeding the stranger's presence, while engrossed by these thoughts.

His visitor shifted about uneasily in his chair until Frank, noticing him, said,—

"I beg your pardon. I was allowing my mind to be taken up with other matters for the moment." He glanced towards the clock as he spoke, and continued, "Perhaps you would like to meet with Mr. Patton. In that case I will take you where he works and intro-

duce you to him, and, as we walk along, will tell you all I know about the family."

The man bowed in acknowledgment of this favor, and, taking up his hat, Frank escorted him out of the office into the street, walking directly towards the shops where John Patton was employed. He had heard that foreigners of rank had such an exalted estimation of the value of their titles that they would bury or cast out of their hearts any affection that might have sprung into life there rather than marry a woman, no matter how lovely or talented she might be, who was without fortune and whose parents were working-people. With a kind of insane satisfaction, therefore, he took this man into the shops where John Patton, with soot-begrimed features, stood among men who, with dark, dirty shirt-sleeves rolled above their elbows, exposing their brawny black arms to view, were pounding and working away at their trade, the perspiration streaming down their faces and necks. He presented his companion to him there, and lingered long enough for him to take a good view of the surroundings, and to have enough conversation with John Patton to enable him to discover his ignorance of the forms of speech and manners that lend grace to polite society.

When they came out into the open air again, the man gave a sigh of relief and hastily brushed with his hands traces of black soot from off his coat as he continued to walk by Frank Raynor's side, listening eagerly to his discourse of the family about whom he was making inquiries.

"The mother is a good woman, uneducated to be sure, but a good mother and a good wife. She has all

her life known what it is to work, and to work hard, too, doing the washing, ironing, baking, cooking, scrubbing, sewing, and all the other homely duties of the house and for her family. She keeps a servant now, though she scarcely knows the use of one, having grown so accustomed to attending to the household duties herself. To be sure, she does not shine in society, because she has no society to make mention of save that of her neighbors and a few of the church people; but what matters that as long as she is happy in her home and unfitted by education and experience for the cares of social life? Who were her people? Ah, that I cannot tell you so much about, but you will meet her presently, and she will gladly tell you of them if you lead her to the subject. Yonder is their home, and there she is herself—— Good-afternoon, Mrs. Patton; allow me to introduce a gentleman from New York, Mr. Blake, a friend of the Count Beaurynski."

Mrs. Patton, who was on her knees on the ground in front of the house with a broken knife in her hand, digging away at the roots of some plants that were growing there, arose as Frank addressed her, and, adjusting her spectacles, extended a brawny hand towards her visitors.

"So glad to meet you, Mr. Blake, and you also, Mr. Raynor. Won't you come in a while?" she asked.

They consented to sit for a few moments on the veranda steps.

Irene had written to her mother about the Count,—as Frank was certain she had,—and, feeling flattered at meeting one of his friends, Mrs. Patton began talking freely and eagerly on whatever subject Mr. Blake

or Frank advanced, and was led skilfully back into the remembrances of her early life and ancestors, never once imagining that thus she was responding to the wishes of her auditors.

(The foolish are always talking; the wise listen.)

When they took their leave, finally, Frank accompanied his companion only a short distance, when excusing himself, he turned to leave him.

"What may I offer, in behalf of the Count Beaurynski, in return for your kindness?" inquired the man, as he was walking away.

"Nothing."

"At least, I may thank you?"

"Do not even thank me." Saying which, he pursued his way so hurriedly that the man stood abashed, looking after him a moment in surprise before slowly retracing his steps to the depot. Frank did not go home at once, but, with every step betokening an excited mind, walked aimlessly onward, he knew and cared not whither, feeling all the while a contempt for himself on account of what he had just done. Occasionally in his course he passed one who knew him and addressed him familiarly. At such he only stared in dumb surprise, and continued on his way. He passed the house he had prepared for his home with Irene, pausing a moment in front of it, and glancing up in pain at its bare windows that stared at him like so many cold, unsympathetic eyes. Something seemed to come like a lump in his throat as he looked, almost strangling him, and he hurried onward. He walked along the road towards The Heights, leaving the city and the noises behind him in the distance, and finally

hearing no sound save the singing of the bobolink in the bushes by the wayside. Coming at length to where the road wound its way through the woods, he turned aside from the beaten path and plunged into where the trees and bushes grew thickest. He experienced a grim satisfaction in trampling down and breaking apart the young vines and twigs in his way, heeding not that his hands were pierced and bleeding by the thorns on some of the branches,—the pain in his heart was so great.

Emerging at last into an open space, he dropped from sheer exhaustion on a mossy knoll. The ground about him was covered with dead leaves, the branches of many of the trees were quite bare, and the solitude was enlivened only by the flitting of a squirrel through the bushes, and the singing of a whip-poor-will in the branches above his head.

An ugly brown toad hopped towards him, looking into his face as if inquiring why he had come hither to disturb its quiet.

"Are you happy, you dull, ugly little creature?" he inquired aloud, startled by the sound of his own voice in the stillness.

The toad slowly opened and closed its eyelids and hopped away, as if answering that it was content. So he interpreted it.

"Contentment! Happy are ye who find it! It is the true synonyme of happiness; not love, as some have said," he continued aloud.

Here in these woods, where the only creatures that populated it knew none of the tortures of a living, thinking mind, the pain of rivalry, the pangs of love,

hate, jealousy, pride, and ambition, he lingered until night began to draw her mantle over the day, and evening was closing in; then, and not before, coming forth, he bent his steps towards home, having pondered over his future course, and determined on a line of conduct to be pursued. He showed settled purpose in his gait. A light rain was beginning to fall. He never heeded it, but continued his way without quickening his pace. The drops fell faster, yet he never hastened.

At home in his room, Marshall Bird, arrayed in dressing-gown and slippers, was sitting alone, engaged in perusing the evening paper, when there came a light rap on his door.

"Come in," he called out, without rising, thinking it was the servant with the pitcher of water he had called for a moment before. The door opened a little way only, and Frank Raynor peered in, looking more sad and haggard than ever he had seen him. His hat, rain-soaked, fell limply over his eyes, and the water dripped from its brim.

"Oh, is it you, Frank? Come in; come in," said the minister, cheerily, arising and coming towards him.

"No, thank you; I won't come in. I only wanted to inquire when you will leave for New York?"

"To-morrow, God willing," the minister replied.

"Well, I have decided to go with you, if you still desire my company," said Frank, trying to assume a light tone, yet failing utterly.

"Indeed, I am overjoyed to have you change your mind," replied the minister, grasping his friend's hand in his own heartily, as if to assure him of his sincerity. The hand enclosed in his was cold and trembling.

"Frank, my friend," he continued, in a serious tone, "you are suffering."

"No, no; you are wrong! It's over now. I have been suffering,—that is all,—but it's over now." And closing the door hastily, he went into his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Count Beaurynski was closeted with his valet for some time in his room at the hotel; and for many hours after the man had left his presence he remained there in solitude, pondering over all that had been related to him of Irene Patton's family and home.

The daughter of a mechanic, whose mother digs in the earth and works in the house all day like a servant! Why, if he were to marry her the papers all over the country would be full of it, and his mother would never recover from the shock it would give her! He determined, finally, to leave New York at once and without again seeing Irene, as it was the only safe course for him to pursue.

When his trunks had all been packed and sent to the station, he ordered a cab and set out to make some farewell calls before leaving. Stopping at a florist's on the way, he ordered a basket of flowers to be sent to Irene, and wrote on a card that should accompany it a line of farewell over his name; then told the driver to proceed up Fifth Avenue. He wanted to

pass by her aunt's house, hoping to catch a glimpse of her face at the window.

The house was passed, and no sight of any one was to be had. An uncontrollable desire then took possession of him to speak with her once again; to touch her hand; to hear her voice once more. Without pausing to reconsider this purpose, he ordered the driver to return and stop at the house.

Irene had risen earlier than had been her custom that morning, unable any longer to rest in her bed on account of disturbing thoughts that harassed her. Uppermost of these was the consciousness that her aunt was growing to dislike her. She had changed in her manner towards her of late. She no longer came into her room as formerly, kissing her before she was out of bed, but had grown quite cold and indifferent.

Irene was puzzled to account for this change. It made her feel that she was no longer a welcome visitor; and the thought of bringing her visit to an end brought to her mind also the necessity of sending some reply to that last letter she had received from Frank. She had long ago decided on the character and substance of the reply, but lacked the courage to write and send what she wanted to say, realizing that it would be a cruel reward for loving and trusting consideration to tell him that another filled her heart; that another had been receiving her caresses while she had been away from him; and that she had given her love, unsought, to that other. And after she had written and sent that answer, what was she to do, she wondered,—go back to Newbridge again? Never!

Put such a distance between herself and cousin? Impossible! There was nothing there now to attract her; there was everything here. The sight of Frank's face, after having so trifled with him, would be torture, while the sight of her cousin's smile was life. Her cousin had never addressed a word of love to her; yet his eyes spoke volumes instead. Basking in his smile, she had forgotten her duty to her betrothed; had put off answering his last letter from day to day, until two weeks had gone by before she was aware. He must be angry with her now, for he had not written again. She felt ashamed as she thought of how cruelly she had been neglecting him, and said to herself as she went down-stairs, "The letter shall be answered to-day; to-day without fail."

Breakfast was not yet served, and no one was in the breakfast-room; so she went into the back parlor, and, seating herself at the piano, began playing over a soft, plaintive melody that she had heard one day in the street. She stopped suddenly as a hand was laid on her shoulder, and, looking up, saw her cousin standing by her side. He smiled at her half-frightened manner.

"The piece is very sad," he said.

"Yes. I caught it from some street-musicians one day," she answered him, wondering why he was looking so pale, and his voice trembled so.

"Irene," he said, after a moment's pause, during which she continued to play softly the air she had begun, "stop a moment. I want to ask you something. Is it true that you plighted your troth with one at home before you came here?"

The question came so suddenly and unexpectedly

that she was unable to recover from her surprise and reply at once, but flushed crimson while she hesitated.

"Tell me, is it true?" he urged, with much agitation.

"It is true that I did," she replied, in a low tone, "but——"

"Do you not know that breakfast is waiting?" said Mrs. Bostwick, entering the room at that moment, interrupting what she was about to say; and, her cousin not waiting to hear, turned at once to leave the room.

He went silently into the breakfast-room, and during the meal, which was a quiet one, he took but little notice of her, and was the first to arise from the table.

"Wait a moment, Robert. I want to speak with you before you go out," said his mother, as he was about to leave; and Irene, surmising that her presence was not desired at this interview, went to her room, leaving them together, and wrote, without delay, the answer she had determined to send to Frank; more than anxious now to have it over with, that she might go to her cousin and tell him that there was no longer an engagement between them. It was a very short epistle she wrote, but long enough to tell him that she could not be his wife, that her heart was another's, that she had been mistaken in thinking that she had ever loved him, and to beg him to forgive her the pain she knew the letter would cause him, and release her from her engagement.

She sealed it, directed and stamped it, and sent Fa-

vette out to mail it without delay. After it was gone she seemed to breathe freer, and, going down-stairs into the parlor again, began playing a lively waltz, trusting that, thereby tracing her whereabouts, Robert would come to her.

But he did not come. The gay measure of the waltz jarred on his ear as he passed through the hall and out of the house, in company with his mother.

She played on, wondering why he did not seek her. The servant entered after a time, bearing a card on a salver. She took it up and read the name of the Count Beaurynski.

"Take it to my aunt," she said.

"She has gone out with Mr. Robert, and the gentleman wishes to see you."

Her aunt and cousin gone out without saying a word to her! This was an odd thing for them to do, and she was not able to understand it. She arose and went to the Count. He came forward to greet her as she entered, wondering how it was possible that so rare a flower had sprung from so plebeian a stem.

It was the first time he had ever seen her alone. Taking her by the hand, he led her to a sofa, seating himself by her side. She had not spoken a word to him, but had simply bowed in greeting when she entered; and he broke the silence by saying,—

"I have called to say good-by. I am going away."

"Going away!" she repeated, in surprise. "When?"

"This afternoon."

"So soon?" she said, slowly and thoughtfully, as if she could scarcely realize that what he was saying could be true. She was looking absently out of the

window, wondering whether it could be possible that her aunt's coldness was on account of her indifference to this man. He thought she was regretting that he was about to leave.

"Yes; I leave this afternoon and go direct to the Pacific Coast," he continued, endeavoring to read her thoughts all the while.

"What a long journey it will be!"

"And lonely, too," he answered. "Oh, Miss Patton,—Irene,—if I might only take you with me! If you would but accompany me, the journey will seem short, and the joy and pleasure of your society unending. Consent to go with me, and I will be your devoted slave." He seized her hand and held it tightly in both his own as he spoke, eagerly awaiting her reply. She turned her face away from his, attempted to withdraw her hand, but made no answer. Encouraged by her silence, he continued, earnestly,—

"I love you, Irene, passionately, devotedly, and I cannot live happily away from you!" She could feel his warm breath close to her cheek as he brought his face nearer to hers and put his arm about her waist, drawing her forcibly towards him. She struggled to release herself from his embrace; he but tightened his clasp.

"Oh, my beloved, come away with me! Let me protect and care for you from henceforth!" He was pressing burning kisses on her lips, against her will. She cried out in distress, wrenched herself finally away from him, and stood before him, her hair dishevelled, cheeks burning, and eyes flashing.

"What are you saying to me?" she inquired, ex-

citedly. "Are you asking me to marry you, or are you but taking advantage of my helpless position?"

The Count dropped his eyes,—only for a moment, however,—then arose and stood beside her, saying, excitedly,—

"Marriage is but a form! Surely if we love each other, that is enough to insure our happiness!" He put out his hands towards her, but she stepped shudderingly back out of his reach.

"Do not touch me! I never dreamed you could be so cowardly, so despicable!" she said, burning with indignation. Then, with voice trembling and eyes overflowing with tears, she immediately added,—

"I had such a high esteem for you! How could you ever talk to me as you have?"

Her tears brought him to himself again.

"Forgive me!" he said. "I was mad! I did not realize what I was saying. Pardon me, do, I beg of you, in pity and kindness, and try to forget it all!"

"If you are truly sorry, leave me! Go away at once, and do not ever speak to me again!" she answered him.

The full realization of the shamelessness of his proposal burst upon him as he looked upon her, and she seemed dearer to him than ever before, now that he had wounded her. He longed to comfort her distress. He would have even besought her to be his wife, so sincerely did he love her, and regret the words that passion had put in his mouth; yet he knew that, after what had been said, such a proposal would be ill-timed and useless. He had sacrificed his self-

respect and put her out of his reach; and, since she had begged of him, if he was truly sorry for what he had said, to say no more, but leave her presence, he could only prove his sincerity by doing as she requested. So, bowing low, in sign of respect, he passed silently out of the house and went his way.

When he had gone, she went up to her room, and, locking herself within, gave full vent to her grief. Tender thoughts of home came to her there in her loneliness. Why, oh, why had she ever left it and come hither? She had had many annoyances to battle with there, but no insult had ever been tendered her within its homely walls. She might now have been happily married, never having known her cousin. Her cousin might never be more to her. What was to become of her if he should withdraw his smiles from her?

Her aunt came rapping at her door shortly before noon, and entered smiling, showing some of her former warmth and fervor, as Irene, with manner nervous in the extreme, opened the door for her.

"You seem to be seeking retirement up here, locked up as you are in your room?" said Mrs. Bostwick, as lightly as she could. She had come hither determined to have a talk with Irene that she trusted would have the effect of breaking up the attachment between Robert and her, and assumed a gayety she did not feel, with the hope of covering up her purpose. Irene's answer was of much help to her in proceeding, for she said,—

"You went out without telling me, and I had no company to seek."

"Yes, to be sure. I had not time to stop and explain. We went to meet an incoming steamer from Europe,—Robert and myself,—and thought we were late, though the boat had not come yet when I left the wharf; but I waited until I was tired, and left Robert to note the time of its arrival and be there to meet it."

"A steamer from Europe! How I wish I could have gone with you! I've always wanted to see one return or leave, laden with passengers. I never saw an ocean steamer in my life," said Irene, regretfully.

"I'm real sorry. I never thought you would care to go, and so did not stop to ask you. Robert was so impatient to be off! You see, it was Mrs. Frothingham and her niece, Celia, we went to meet, and Robert is very fond of Celia; I am glad to know that he is, for she is immensely wealthy. I've told you about her before, have I not?" inquired Mrs. Bostwick, with well-assumed indifference.

"Yes; you have spoken of her often, but never of her and Robert together."

"No, I presume not. Robert does not like to have me speak of his private affairs. Yet I don't suppose, after all, he would mind my telling you. They would probably have been married by this time had not your uncle's death occurred when it did."

Mrs. Bostwick could see the color leave Irene's cheek while she talked, and her eyes seemed to be entreating her to say nothing more on a subject every word of which was stabbing her to the heart's core. She shifted the topic in pity.

"The Count Beaurynski called while I was out."

"Yes," the answer came, coldly.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes." The color was coming back into Irene's face.

"He is going away."

"How did you know? Have you seen him, also?" Irene inquired, looking into her aunt's eyes with a startled expression.

"No; but there is a basket of flowers below that he has sent to you, with his compliments and a farewell."

"To me!" Irene arose from the side of the bed, where she had been sitting, with defiant manner and flashing eyes.

Mrs. Bostwick was watching her closely.

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"Ah, indeed, why not," answered Irene, recovering her composure. "Would it not have been more natural for him to have sent them to you, since he said good-by to me in person?"

"What else did he say?" queried her aunt. The color arose and completely covered Irene's face again, as she answered, impetuously,—

"Must I repeat all that he said? I fear that I cannot recall everything."

"No, Irene, by no means. I wanted to know only whether he spoke to you of marriage. I know he cares for you."

"Marriage!" Irene repeated, as if in amazement; then, bursting into a hysterical laugh, she hid her face in the pillow of the bed. Turning it again towards her aunt, with tears in her bright eyes, she said,—

"He asked me to go away with him, to be his mistress! That is what he said to me when he called."

"The coward!" broke out Mrs. Bostwick. "Oh, Irene, what did you say, dear? What did you do? Without me here, too!"

"Yes; if you had been here he would never have said it, I am sure!" and, going over to her aunt, she fell at her feet, exclaiming, "Oh, why did you not take me with you when you went out this morning? Why did you leave me behind? I might have been spared so much pain and humiliation!"

"Never mind, dear. He is a heartless villain, to talk so to my pretty, unprotected Irene. Forget him, and what he said. He is gone now. Let us talk of other things." And she tenderly smoothed back the hair from Irene's forehead.

"Tell me, my dear, when do you intend to marry?" she continued, after waiting for Irene to recover from her sudden outburst of weeping.

"To marry?" Irene inquired, in surprise. "Marry whom?"

"Why, the gentleman you promised to marry before you left home,—Mr. Raynor, of course. You have not changed your mind, have you?"

"You advised me to wait."

"Did I? True; so I did. I had forgotten about it. Yet, I think now that perhaps it is better as it is."

"How?"

"That you marry him, as you intended. You may not do better by waiting, after all. You might, perhaps, if I could help you; but if I have to give up my home here, I may be unable to do that."

"Are you going to give up your home here?"

"I may be obliged to do so. Your uncle Robert

left very little money when he died, and I cannot afford to keep up the establishment much longer, for my means will not permit. The thought of living without the conveniences to which I have grown accustomed is heart-rending. I am sure I don't know what I am to do! To be sure, when Robert marries Celia Frothingham everything will be different. They will probably live here with me, or I will live with them, I suppose. Only my position in my home will be different, of course; not so independent as it has been heretofore."

An expression of pain that made her look very old rested on Mrs. Bostwick's face, and she summoned a few tears to her aid. Irene was much moved.

"Dear Aunt Mollie, I never dreamed of such a change for you. I am so sorry to hear of it!" Her arms entwined themselves lovingly about her aunt's neck.

"Of course, Robert, even after he marries, will always see that I am properly provided for." The arms loosened a little, and a great quivering sigh forced itself from Irene's throat, but she said nothing. "It will doubtless be wiser, after all, for you to marry Mr. Raynor, as it is better to live moderately all your life than to know wealth and luxury the greater part of it, until they have become second nature and necessity, and then be deprived of them, my child. He is a good man, too, is he not?"

"Who? Oh, Mr. Raynor? Yes."

"Well, he is certainly of good family, and has an excellent position; and you—love him—too, I suppose?"

The question was asked hesitatingly.

"I do not know." The answer was firm enough.

"Well, at least you respect him. That is sufficient to insure happiness. I did not love your uncle, but I respected him and made him a good, true wife, and was happy with him."

Had she ever been really happy,—this selfish, changeful creature, who had looked to her husband as to one whose business it was to gratify her caprices and furnish her with the luxuries and the necessities of home and life? and did she make her husband happier for being his wife? Irene wondered, as the words of the old man, who had taken her hand at parting in her home at Newbridge, "May you make some good man happy," came back full of secret meaning to her now.

"Perhaps, if you had loved him you would have been even happier," she ventured to suggest.

"What need of love? I was contented enough without it! I had everything I needed or could wish for."

"Yes; you married a rich man, but Mr. Raynor is not rich. How could I ever fill up the void that absence of love would make in my life were I to marry him?"

"Nonsense! You are such a child! Don't marry him if you think you will not be happy with him. Why did you promise yourself to him in the first place?"

Why, indeed? The question had asked itself of her a hundred times before.

Favette came in at this moment and called them to lunch, and they went down together without making any effort to continue the conversation.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER what her aunt had confided to her concerning her own and Robert's private affairs, Irene no longer felt free to extend her visit; and, after lunch was over, she went to her room to think what course she should pursue.

Her head and heart were aching; and her mind was unsettled. All thoughts of returning to Newbridge were odious, and the prospect of remaining in the city, without money or friends, hopeless. Amid the maze of wild, impracticable plans and ideas that went whirling through her head, there seemed but one light shining forth in the darkness; one true heart only, one loving friend, who would stand by her side alike in success and trouble, never failing her when all others would, —Frank Raynor; to him she knew she could always look up with confidence and esteem, even if she did not love him. It would have been better for her to have kept her word with him, only it was too late to think of that now. The letter had been sent. Oh, that she had delayed it but a day longer!

If she had only remained at home, she would never have known this new love that had come to her. New love,—no, first love it was. The feeling she had for Frank was entirely different.

She had first felt the influence of love during those quiet and happy days at Long Branch, when she had looked into the tender gray eyes of her cousin. She

had painted then more to please him than to gratify herself, and because he praised her work and the artist was his friend. She hung on every syllable he uttered, though he had never spoken of love, and she would have given up home, friends, and ambition for him had he so besought her. Once she had run against him in the hall of the cottage, when it was dusk, before the lamps were lighted, and he had caught her in his arms and kissed her; and when she had attempted to chide, he silenced her with more kisses, saying, "We are cousins, you know." After that there had been many kisses and caresses exchanged, and in the light of his smiles she had forgotten all else; and now her faith in him was shaken. Were all men alike? Did they but send her flowers, praise her beauty, and seek her society only to entertain themselves, to while away an idle hour, or to accomplish some base design? No, not all; it had not been so with Frank; his purpose had been true and honorable, and he had loved her honestly and faithfully without doubt notwithstanding her neglect of him. She arose, and going to the little trunk in the corner of the room unlocked it and took therefrom the ring he had given her when she promised to be his wife, and slipped it on her finger again. She had forgotten to return it with the letter she had sent; now she was wishing with all the earnestness of her selfish nature that she had forgotten even to send the letter.

A servant rapped on her door and entered, handing her a card. Her head seemed to whirl around and she was scarcely able to realize that she saw aright as she read the name,—"Frank Raynor." Why had he come

to New York without letting her know beforehand, she wondered, and instantly the thought flashed through her brain that, since he was here, he would, of course, not receive the letter she had mailed him that morning, and she could perhaps induce him to return it unopened; if she succeeded, then their engagement should stand. Yes, better be his wife—since Robert did not love her, but had been only amusing himself in her society in the absence of a dearer one—than to endure life again as she otherwise must in her home at Newbridge. Her love for her cousin would always live in her heart, she was certain, and she should always look back tenderly to the happy days spent in his company; but since she must leave her aunt's and go to her father's home or Frank Raynor's, she preferred the home of the latter. She brushed back her curls and tried to look cheerful and happy as she went down to meet him.

Left alone in the parlor, while the servant had gone to announce his presence, Frank took a hasty look around the room, allowing his eyes to rest at length on a magnificent basket of natural flowers resting on a stand near by. Bending over that he might inhale their fragrance, he caught sight of a card, bearing on it Irene's name and that of the Count Beaurynski.

Taking it up, he read the words of farewell it contained with set lips, "This is the end of it all," he said, half aloud; "this is the last act of the drama." He paced up and down the parlor slowly and in deep thought, still holding the card in his hand, while he waited for Irene to appear. She came at last, but

hesitated a moment at the door-way, as he looked towards her, shocked at his changed appearance.

"Oh, Frank!" she said, with tone full of regret, going towards him and extending her hand. It came upon her all at once that she was the cause of this great change in him, and she was overcome by a feeling of self-reproach. "I have been cruel to you. I ought to have written long ago, but I never dreamed that you cared so much; you were so severe in that last letter you wrote that I was angry and would not answer it at once. Can you ever forgive me?" she said, in distress.

He surveyed her calmly as he led her to a seat.

"I could wait no longer. I have come to learn what you intend to do. You promised to return soon," he said.

"I know, I know; but the time passed so fast I never realized that I was so long away. I meant to have returned before this. Forgive my negligence of duty, I beg of you."

He looked down at the card which he still held in his hand, and, quietly extending it towards her, said,—

"I took the liberty of admiring those flowers, not knowing, at first, that they were yours."

"The flowers? I had not seen them," she said, confusedly, taking the card from his hand and reading what it contained.

He watched her face as she read and saw every vestige of color flee from it, while involuntarily her hand went up to her heart. Silently she went over and replaced the card among the flowers again, and he noticed that her hand trembled violently as she did so;

but she made no comment either on the flowers or the sender.

"Irene, look at me," he said. She raised her eyes to his face. "I have suffered on account of your silence more than you can ever know or understand. I have come here now to solve the doubt, which is almost killing me." She continued to look up at him in silence. "I have begun to think, to believe, that you love another." Her face flushed crimson, and she recalled the letter she had sent. "Ah, I was right, I see. I began to feel, to know it. I came here to seek confirmation from your own lips of what I have suspected, and to release you——"

"Oh, Frank, Frank, you do not mean it!" she interrupted, throwing herself at his feet, and bursting forth into pitiable sobs. He, even he, was casting her off, and her only hope was slipping away from her.

"If you wished to be released, I was going to add; never unless you wish it," he added eagerly, raising her up and holding her in his embrace, and kissing her for the first time since he had come. She wept on his shoulder, saying faintly and brokenly,—

"I was angry with you only for writing so harshly to me; surely you will forgive me?"

"And you love me yet, and will marry me?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure I will; you must not doubt me." She was almost hysterical, yet all the while her conscience seemed censuring her.

"Prove it to me by becoming my wife at once,—to-day."

"To-day?" she repeated, starting away from him in surprise.

"Yes, to-day,—why not? We should have been united long ago. The doubts that have been driving me almost wild for weeks must be thus appeased. I determined upon it before ever I came here. The engagement must either be broken off or the marriage take place without further delay."

"But what will my aunt and mother think?"

"What does it matter to you or me what they think, so long as we love each other? I have waited too long already. I have always consulted your wishes heretofore. Now I ask you to carry out mine. If you love me you will not stop to think of your mother and aunt, but of yourself and me. Everything can be afterwards explained satisfactorily to the others, without doubt."

"Well, let it be as you desire," she answered him, when he had finished, thinking that a season of doubt and suspense that would otherwise intervene would thus be avoided.

They talked afterwards with her aunt, who, much to Irene's surprise, looked on the plan of their immediate union with much favor.

"You shall be married this evening, here in my house," she said.

"And we will afterwards leave at once for Boston, and visit my mother and sister," added Frank, turning to Irene.

"How very romantic it will be!" continued Mrs. Bostwick, clapping her hands in childish glee.

Irene said nothing, but after Frank had taken leave of her she went to her room. It seemed as if her heart would never beat naturally again, it kept up

such a labored, spasmodic action now. Yesterday she was full of hope, joyous, and happy; to-day she was burdened down with despair.

"What a sober face you have, for one who is about to become a bride!" said her aunt, coming into her room and observing her silent agony.

"Oh, aunt, dear aunt! Why did you not offer some objection to its taking place so soon?" Irene cried out.

"Why, is not one time as good as another? I said what I thought you wanted me to say. What does it matter, anyway? I thought it would be pleasanter for you both to have it happen here than at your home; besides, I did not wish to seem inhospitable."

A low moan escaped Irene.

"Cheer up! Don't look so glum! You don't take the right view of people and life. I can't understand why you act as you do, anyway. You like him well enough, don't you? I am sure I don't see what better you can do now."

Irene could not answer her. She would have liked to have waited,—waited until she could have seen her cousin again, and have given him an opportunity for finishing what he had started to say to her that morning.

It was all over at last. They were married quietly in the back parlor of her aunt's house by Mr. Bird, in the presence of his father and mother and Mrs. Bostwick. Robert was not there.

It had seemed a very sad affair, though Irene bore up through it all with wonderful fortitude. A telegram had been sent in the afternoon by Frank to his mother,

announcing their coming, and slipping away from the little company as soon as she could after the ceremony was over, Irene went up to her room to see that everything belonging to her had been packed and to be alone for a moment. There was no light in the hallway leading to her room save the reflection from the lighted gas below. As she turned the knob of the door and was about to enter, a hand was laid heavily on her shoulder, and, turning in affright, she saw her cousin standing beside her.

"Come with me. I want to speak with you," he said, in a husky voice, as he took hold of her arm and led her down the hall to the front of the house, into a small open room formed by the swelled front.

He took her face between his hands and turned it towards the window, so that the moonlight from the street streamed in upon it.

"Is it true, what they have been telling me, that you were married this evening, to—to——"

"Mr. Raynor? Yes!" she answered, firmly enough, though she dropped her eyes, that he might not look into them.

"And you love him?" he continued. She did not answer. "Tell me; do you love him?" he repeated, removing his hands from her face and holding her arm so tightly that it pained her.

"What does it matter to you?" she answered, endeavoring to free herself from his grasp.

"What is it to me? Everything! Have I no right to know the truth from your lips, when you have won my heart, and taught me to love you?"

"Stop, in mercy, I beg of you!" she interrupted. "You knew that I had promised him!"

"Yes; I knew it, but I did not think you would marry him, for I thought—I believed—that you loved me all the while, and that you would certainly break with him. Oh, Irene, Irene! how could you bid me hope with eyes and lips, when in your heart you loved another?"

"It is not true! It is not true! I never cared for him as I do for you. I have never loved any other but you in my life. I thought you were going to marry the one you met at the steamer, who was rich! Oh, Robert, I had no other hope! Even now I scarcely realize the step I have taken! You never told me that you cared for me!"

Her tone and manner were pitiful, yet he did not seem to heed them, but, releasing his hold, pushed her ever so slightly from him.

"And you married without love? Miserable woman!" He turned and left her standing there, without another word.

"Robert! Robert! stay one moment! Listen!" she called to him. He did not hear her, or if he did he made no sign, but went on his way; and the poor overwrought body, with its harassed mind and broken spirit, at last succumbed to the tension which trouble had wrought upon it, and she fell on the floor in a swoon.

There Mrs. Bostwick found her when she came to see what was detaining her so long. She called aloud for help. Frank, with a premonition of evil, sprang up the stairs with a bound; when he saw Irene stretched

out on the floor there, her face upturned amid its mass of golden curls, looking so white and still in the moonlight, he caught her up in his arms, and clasped her to his breast, crying out, in despair,—

"Irene! oh, my lovely Irene, what has happened? She is dead! She is dead!"

"No, she is not dead; she has fainted. That is all. Bring some water to me, quick! Here, chafe her hands, while I sprinkle her face! What has brought this about, I wonder! Look! She has not been in her room at all!" said Mrs. Bostwick, excitedly.

A physician was sent for, and until he came they worked away with her. Slowly, life struggled back, but consciousness did not return with it. The eyes that opened and looked about had no recognition in them for any one.

The physician inquired into the probable cause of the swoon; and they told of her recent and sudden marriage, and suggested that perhaps the excitement overcame her.

"Perhaps so," the physician said aloud, but to himself he said, "There is more besides."

The journey to Boston was necessarily postponed, and Frank sent a request to his mother to join him at the bedside of his sick wife. She came immediately, —a dear, good woman, whose presence was a great comfort and solace to him at this time.

For days Irene tossed in a fever, unconscious of all about her.

"She will come out all right, for she is young and full of life and vigor. Her mind and body simply gave way under too great strain." So the physician

said, by the way of encouragement to the sorrowing husband.

One morning, acting on his mother's advice, Frank took a walk after breakfast. Irene was yet unconscious of her surroundings, though it was very nearly a week since she had first been taken, and, as her condition was considered critical, he would not leave her longer than was required for needful rest.

Robert had gone away from home the evening of the wedding, saying, in a short note he left for his mother, that he was going out of the city for a few days, yet giving no reason for the sudden leave-taking. She understood why he had gone thus, having learned from the servants that he had been home that evening, though she had not seen him.

As Frank walked along, he directed his steps towards the hotel where he had stopped on coming to the city, and where he had ordered his mail to be forwarded to him. Among the many letters he found there awaiting him was the one Irene had sent to him. She had put off telling him about it until they should be married, not willing to excite his suspicions beforehand, and, as she had not had opportunity, he knew nothing of it, and in surprise now opened and perused it, unable at first to fully realize its purport. When the truth forced itself upon him, awakening as from a dream, he said to himself,—

"She loves the Count Beaurynski. I ought to have known it when she paled so at the mention of his name, and at the sight of the flowers with his written good-by. Oh, why did I not suspect that her penitential grief on meeting me was but the outpouring of

a conscience-stricken and despairing heart! And we found her in a swoon so soon after her marriage! 'Her mind and body gave way under too great strain,' the physician said. 'Tis true! 'tis true! Her marriage is repulsive to her!

Unselfish man, he never once upbraided her even in his thoughts for the wrong she had done him in thus taking him for her husband,—not once. His own grief was swallowed up in the knowledge of her distress. He walked about the streets while deliberating over what was best for him to do under existing circumstances to make life endurable for her as his wife. He desired no counsel from any one. It was not his manner of working out a troublesome and perplexing problem; he simply remained away from every one who knew him until he was calm and had himself determined how to act.

"She recovered consciousness in your absence, and has fallen asleep," were his mother's first words to him on his return to the house.

"I thank God for that," he said, fervently. "She will continue to improve now without doubt; and I can, therefore, leave her with less discomfort than when she was unconscious."

"Are you going away?" she inquired, in surprise.

"Yes; I found a letter at the hotel, where I ordered my mail sent, which contains news of such import as will necessitate my return to Newbridge at once."

"Without Irene? How unfortunate."

"Yes, without her," he said, slowly; "but you will stay here and take good care of her, I am sure, since I must leave her; and if there is any change for the

worse,"—he paused and choked back a sob,—"why, telegraph me, that I may return at once. If she continues to improve, as the doctor promised she would as soon as consciousness returned, she could not be in better hands than yours; and I will send or come for her when she is able to travel. Write to me every day, mother, and tell me how she progresses, and care for her tenderly and watchfully while I am away. I must leave in an hour, and will just steal in ever so softly and look at her as she lies asleep,—I'll not disturb her," he said, as his mother made a gesture of remonstrance. "Surely you would not have me leave without seeing her?"

He went his way to her room. Favette was sitting there at the foot of the bed. She rose and quietly left when he entered. He approached the bedside where Irene lay with her face turned from him, and one of her arms outside of the coverlid, the sleeve pushed partly away from it. Almost it seemed like sacrilege to him to stand and look on her, as she lay helpless in sickness and unconsciousness in sleep, after what he had learned in her letter.

"Oh, my darling, why did I ever permit you to leave me!" he cried out, as he fell on his knees by the side of the bed and took up her hand, pressing it gently to his lips. She sighed in her sleep and turned her face towards him, drawing her hand away as she did so; her lips parted, and she murmured a name. Did he hear aright, or did he imagine it was Count Beaurynski's?

"She does not love me now; but she shall, she shall, if it takes the rest of my life to win her," he said,

half aloud; and, leaning over, he lightly touched her lips with his own and hurried from the room.

"Be sure and write to me every day, and tell me as soon as she is able to travel," he said, excitedly, as he kissed his mother at parting.

"That I will, rest assured. Take good care of your own health, my son; you are looking too pale and thin, and are not well, I fear."

"Oh, yes, I am. I have been working hard of late; then worrying, too, about Irene, you know. I shall be all right in a few days. Don't worry about me, but look after and take good care of her. Good-by."

"He is working too hard, or the climate does not agree with him there in the West. He is not like he used to be," said Mrs. Raynor to herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Is it true, or is it some horrible dream?" called out Irene, awakening from sleep several hours after Frank had taken leave of his mother.

The words were spoken half aloud as if she were asking the question of herself; but the room was so still that they were heard distinctly by her who sat near the window and watched.

"What is it, my child?" answered a tender voice, and Mrs. Raynor glided to the bedside and leaned over her.

"Who are you?" inquired Irene, not heeding the

question, but staring with wide-open eyes into the face that bent over her.

"I am Frank's mother, and yours now, my dear."

"Then it is true?"

"What?"

"That I am married to him."

"Yes, it is true; do you not remember? But no, perhaps you do not, for you were taken ill soon afterwards, they said, and you have been unconscious for a long time."

A shudder passed over Irene as she answered,—

"Yes, yes; I remember it all now; and have you been here ever since?"

"Yes; Frank sent for me, and I came at once, and have been here ever since."

"Where is Aunt Mollie?"

"In her room, I think; shall I call her?"

"No, no, please don't; I am tired and thirsty."

Mrs. Raynor poured out for her a glass of cool water and placed it to her lips, lifting her with one arm into a sitting posture that she might swallow with greater ease.

"You are very kind," said Irene, faintly, as she sank back again on the pillow, and Mrs. Raynor smoothed back the hair from her forehead.

"It is a pleasure to me to be of any use to my son's wife," she answered, simply. "Is there anything more I can do now for you?"

"Nothing." There were tears glistening beneath Irene's long lashes.

"What a child she is! a mere baby! and she does not inquire for her husband; so odd of her!" Mrs.

Raynor said to herself, as she resumed her seat at the window. She took up the book she had put down and continued to read, glancing frequently towards the bed, where her charge lay so still that she thought she must have fallen asleep again.

"Mrs. Raynor," Irene called out, so suddenly as to startle her. She approached the bedside again.

"Yes, my child."

"Where is he?"

"Frank? Your husband?"

Irene nodded.

"He has returned to Newbridge."

"Gone!" exclaimed Irene.

"Don't worry, dear; he had to go. His business required him, you know; but he will come back when you are better, or you will go to him as soon as you are able to travel."

"Did he say so?"

"Indeed he did,—he did not want to leave you, but he received a letter this morning and had to go. He only went away a little while ago, and I have promised him to stay by you until you are fully recovered."

"How strange it all seems. I wonder whether Frank has made a judicious marriage?" the old lady thought, as she again took her place by the window.

At the mention of the word "letter," came back to Irene's mind the remembrance of the one she had mailed to him on the morning of their marriage. If he returned to Newbridge he would receive it, and would certainly despise her if he should learn its contents. Something must be done. She asked to see Favette alone.

Mrs. Raynor left the room, and Favette came in her stead.

"Favette, quick; get a pencil and paper, please. I must send a message," she said, excitedly.

Favette hastened to execute her commission, and with trembling hand she wrote a message, asking her husband to retain her letter unopened until he should see her.

"Send that by telegraph immediately, Favette. You will find money in my purse in the upper drawer of the bureau," she said, handing what she had written to the maid, and sinking back exhausted on the pillow.

A few days later, she received in reply a letter, which read:

"IRENE,—Your message came too late; the letter was forwarded to me in New York, and I read it there before leaving. Do not be troubled on account of it. I am prepared to do all in my power to make you comfortable and happy, and await with much eagerness the time of your arrival here, as I have been preparing your home for your reception. Let me know when you will be able to travel.

"Faithfully yours,

"FRANK."

That was all. There was no way of her knowing the bitter heart-throes that dictated it; no chance for her to discover the sacrifice of pride it cost; yet she was overcome by a feeling of unworthiness when she learned its contents.

CHAPTER XVII.

FRANK RAYNOR had a temperament and disposition such as few men possess,—considerate, unselfish, and forgiving. He was of determined will and firm purpose, strong in his convictions of right and wrong, and ever ready to uphold the right. He was bitter in his dislikes, but not revengeful. He had many intimate friends, but no confidantes,—that may have been the reason that he seemed never gay,—though always agreeable among his friends. His manner in business was inclined to be very imperative, and many disliked him on account of his severity. He made new friends among men slowly, though he progressed rapidly in his acquaintance with women, being always attentive and respectful to them.

"You seem especially favored by the women," a friend said to him, one day, as they left a party of ladies, who had detained him a moment in passing, while they were walking on the main street of Newbridge.

"I have a great regard and respect for all women," he answered, quietly.

"For that one even?" inquired his friend, pointing to a notorious person just driving past in her carriage.

"For that one? No! She sacrificed the distinguishing characteristic of true womanhood, when she became what she is," he answered.

He had great confidence in his own judgment; and

when, after thoughtful deliberation, he came to any decision he believed to be right, it was almost an impossibility to change him. After reading that last letter of Irene's, he sought to make due allowance for her youth and inexperience. Most men would have become enraged and have deserted her under like circumstances. He never once dreamed of such a course. He pitied her, and thought only of how he could best make her life happy and win her love. He had left her lying there ill in the great city, because he thought it would be painful for her to have him near, and, besides, he wanted to bring her into her own home immediately on her return to Newbridge, and it was necessary that he should prepare it for habitation beforehand.

He had called on her parents when he first came back, to explain why she lingered in New York. Mrs. Patton's reception was not what he had anticipated and dreaded,—enthusiastic and over-familiar. She did not welcome him with words, even, but with manner cool and stiff; led him into the parlor as though he were the greatest stranger in the world. It had cost no little sacrifice to her pride, and no little amount of self-control, for Mrs. Patton to overlook the fact that the management of her own family affairs had been interfered with when, without her advice and counsel, Irene had married away from home, sending to her only a telegram when it was too late to offer objection. So when she learned of Irene's illness she said,—

"My poor, dear Irene, of course it made her sick to marry away from home,—you ought not have asked it of her. Why, she never did anything without my

consent and counsel before. It was a shame for you to insist, for of course it's been all your doings," and as she poured forth a volley of sobs Frank was beside himself with disgust, and was unable to think of anything save the incident of months before, when she had burned the book Irene had borrowed. He disliked her more than ever now, because he felt that, had she not been so severe in her treatment and training of Irene, her life would have been happier and he might not now have so much to regret. He said as calmly as he could in reply,—

"Well, it is too late now to change the manner of our marriage. I had hoped you would not care, as we were satisfied and happy, Mrs. Patton." He could never call this woman mother.

"Well, it's your planning and doings, and you've both got to abide by it; but no good's ever bound to come of a marriage that's unknown to the knowledge and consent of the parents and that takes place away from under the parental roof, now mark my words," she answered him, wiping her eyes on the corner of her apron. Her talk annoyed him, and he was glad when the call was ended.

Congratulations poured in upon him from all sides. An account of his marriage appeared in the Newbridge papers, and he had to explain to so many people why Irene had not returned with him. Each day the papers took note of his movements and published them. "He was furnishing his house," "Mrs. Raynor was expected on the morrow," "he had purchased an upright piano," "his sister was the wife of a prominent merchant in Boston," "Mrs. Frank Raynor was

the guest of her aunt in New York," almost he expected to read that his wife was in love with another. They seemed to find out everything and publish it.

One day, as he was in a store making some purchases, Dora Clark came towards him, with a smile that brightened everything about her and manner full of life and good cheer, congratulating him on his marriage and talking pleasantly to him of Irene.

"Do you know, I foresaw this marriage that day we had the excursion on 'The Heights.' What a prophetess I was, to be sure," she said, gayly.

"What led you to think of such an event then?" he inquired.

"Oh, I could read in your eyes that you adored her, and was sure she could not long be proof against such homage and devotion as yours, and I am sure you will always be happy together."

"I hope so," he answered, earnestly, and turning to look again at some curtains which he had thought of buying, he called on her to pass judgment on them.

"Are you going to furnish the house completely before Mrs. Raynor's return?" she questioned.

"I thought of doing so."

"I should think she would not like that. Every woman likes to superintend the selection and arrangement of her own household furniture. It's one of the first pleasures of housekeeping."

"You think so? Now, I had a fancy that she would be better pleased to return and find her home all in readiness to receive her."

"I haven't a doubt of it; and men don't understand these things. Let me meddle a little. She could not live

with comfort in an empty house, to be sure; but, if I were you, I would just get the absolute necessities for a beginning,—a fork, a plate, a spoon, a table, and a chair; even if you had to eat without table-cloth or napkins, for a time, rather than have every convenience and have them not suit her. There, have I said enough?"

Frank was laughing at her merry banter.

"Not nearly enough! So much am I impressed with the excellence of your judgment that I want to seek it further, and beg you to assist me in selecting these main essentials."

"And nothing would please me better," she answered.

And with many hints thereafter from Dora Clark, and much able assistance from Mrs. Patton, who—recovering somewhat from her former ill-feeling—volunteered to lend a hand, enough of the house was furnished to make it habitable and comfortable; and there was more than a table and a chair and a spoon; there were soft, luxuriant easy-chairs and sofas, a piano, handsome cabinets and mirrors, a beautiful clock that sounded the hour like soft cathedral chimes; there were also rich, thick carpets, with rugs scattered about, and heavy *portières* at all the doors; screens, pictures, and bric-a-brac, and a full set of china for the table. At this last addition Mrs. Patton ventured a remonstrance.

"It's all nonsense," she said. "Irene will break one of these cups every time she washes them, she's so careless. Plain ware is just as good, less expensive, and more serviceable."

"She will not need to wash them," answered Frank, barely able to conceal his impatience.

"If she does not like the furniture, rugs or curtains, when she comes, she can have them changed to suit her," said Dora Clark, when all was in order.

The kitchen and larder had been well stocked by Mrs. Patton, who had taken the furnishing of that part of the house under her own direction entirely, and had brought from her own cellar numberless cans of fruit, jelly, and honey, and similar delicacies, that were always to be found there; and a pleasant-faced mulatto woman was installed as housemaid, when Frank went over to the railway station, one evening, to meet Irene, who was, at her own request, returning alone.

He hurried up to her as she alighted from the train, and, imprinting a kiss on her pale cheek, led her to a carriage in waiting. They were driven to the house of her parents first; and on the way thither he inquired after her health and the events of her journey, his mother and her aunt, but never in any way referred to the letter. She had been looking forward with dread to this meeting, fearing lest he should make mention of it, and trying to think what she would do or say in case he did, or even in case he did not; and she had worked herself into a fit of nervous excitement, so that now, as he talked to her there in the carriage, she scarcely heard what he was saying, and failed to reply intelligently to any of his inquiries. Even after they had reached her father's home, and the greetings were all over, and her mother was telling her all about her own home, she listened passively, feeling like a newly-

caged bird longing for escape, yet seeing no way of obtaining it.

A heavy quivering sigh escaped her, finally. They all heard it, but no one understood save her husband. "My head aches, and I am so tired," she said, by way of explanation, seeing they looked at her in surprise.

"The journey has been too much for you, I fear, in your weakened condition," said Frank, considerately. "I think we had better go to our own home, now, where you can have the rest and quiet you need."

Rest and quiet! was she ever to know them again? She cast her eyes wildly about the rooms of home that looked so small to her now,—the ceilings so low and the furnishing so homely,—after having lived in her aunt's mansion; yet she wanted to fall at her husband's feet and entreat of him to let her remain where she was, the only place on earth—it seemed to her now—where rest or peace of mind might be obtained by her.

But he had already brought her wrap to her and was waiting to help her on with it, so she arose mechanically to enable him to do so.

"We will walk home from here," he said; "the moon is full, and I think the air will refresh you." She sought to answer him pleasantly, and appear as happy as they all thought her,—but the effort was a pitiful one. The strangeness of her demeanor, however, was attributed to her late illness, no one wondered at it; and she bade them good-night, and went her way with her husband. When they reached their destination, lingering at the gate a moment before entering, he said,—

"This is to be your home, Irene, and may you ever find peace and comfort within its walls."

"Let us go within, I am cold," was her only reply, as she shivered in the moonlight, and pressed him forward.

"I feel faint," she said, as they passed through the parlors which were lighted in anticipation of their arrival.

"Sit here a moment, while I bring you a glass of water," he said, leading her to a sofa. It was impossible for her to conceal her agitation; she wanted to entreat him to permit her to go away from this home, anywhere, out in the world, and be forgotten by him, rather than to remain. Her face was fevered and her hand trembled perceptibly, as she took the glass of water which he brought to her.

"The journey was too much for you, I fear," he said.

"Perhaps; but I am feeling better, now," she replied, with an effort, anxious to appear contented for his sake, even if she could not feel so.

The clock on the mantel, in the adjoining room, chimed out the hour of ten.

"What a pleasant sound!" she exclaimed, looking about for its source.

"You like it? It is the clock in the next room. I procured it among other things such as I thought were needed, and that I hoped might please you. If there is anything with which you are not suited, send it back and exchange it for what will please you. Would you like to look about the house?" he added. "It is not too late, if you feel strong enough."

"Yes, yes; I would like to see everything," she answered hastily.

He led the way through all the rooms,—part were bare and part were furnished.

"You can arrange the empty rooms to please your own fancy; I only had those fitted up that I thought were needed. This room I had arranged for your own," he added, as he opened the door of a large room and lighted the gas that she might see it better,—watching her face while he listened to hear what she would say.

It was furnished in white and gold.

"It is beautiful!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, overcome by the delicacy and beauty of its arrangement.

"I am glad you are pleased with it. It was after my own idea. I like to see you in white, or with white about you; it seems so much better suited to you than anything else you wear. But it grows late and you are tired. May I ask you to sit here for a moment, and listen to something I want to say to you?" She sat down on a low chair, near where she had been standing, dreading, yet seeing no possible way of avoiding what she was sure he was about to speak of at last, —that letter. He began in a low voice,—

"We are husband and wife." Her face paled as he said this. "I believed that you cared for me more than for any other when you pledged your word to be mine, —before you went away,—but you never realized then the true meaning of love, or you would not have so soon forgotten me." He paused a moment to gain further command of himself, and then continued:

"By chance, I learned what led me to surmise that another was winning your affections away from me, and I went to seek from your own lips the truth, determined, if what I had been led to believe was true, to release you from your promise to me. Yes, I would have given you up rather than, by taking to myself an unloving wife, to have shattered the hope of a happy future for both. You know too well the result of that visit to you, yet I feel that you will be better reconciled to your fate by knowing what I have reason to believe, that the man who won your heart is unworthy of you, and never would have made you his wife. He fancied you, no doubt. He admired your youthful innocence, grace, and beauty; but, had he loved you truly and honestly, he would have taken you to himself and never have hesitated because of your poverty." He was about to add "station;" but fearing to offend where there seemed to be no necessity, and it could do no possible good, he continued: "But he was too worldly and cowardly, and were you now free to marry whom you chose, he would never seek you for his wife."

He was thinking of the Count Beaurynski, while she thought only of Robert Bostwick.

"You wronged both yourself and me when you consented to our marriage. Your future happiness must pay the forfeit."

She attempted to answer. He motioned her to silence, and continued,—

"I do not mean to chide, for I have forgiven you, Irene. I, being blinded by love, never paused to consider that your marriage with me might result from a

sense of obligation and duty, and be but the retrieving of an almost broken vow by a despairing woman. I love you, Irene, notwithstanding all that has come between us; and if love and devotion ever meet with fitting reward, we will yet, in the future, secure happiness with each other. We are husband and wife, and yet such a relation can never be perfected without love of each for the other. You do not dislike me, I feel certain; yet you would learn to hate me if I sought from you all the duties and requirements of marriage, without a perfect union of our hearts. I will not do this; neither will I consent to your living apart from me in the world, for people would toy with your name, and make your life wretched with their idle gossip. No; I have promised to love, honor, and protect you, and I will keep my word. Here you may live above reproach, and the world need never know that you are not satisfied if you are willing to make sufficient sacrifice to keep up such appearance. I cannot spare you the silent heartache which you will doubtless suffer; it will be the inevitable consequence of your mistake, yet you can be comfortable here, and may even find enjoyment. I shall hope that time may soon come when your love will be given to me, but may Heaven restrain me from ever entwining with these arms and holding in my embrace for one moment a loveless wife." He drew his hand across his eyes, as if to brush away some distressing picture from his vision.

"That is all I have to say. I will leave you now. Try and sleep, that in the morning you may feel stronger. The servant I have secured for you will have breakfast without your giving yourself any care

about it. You are much in need of rest,—you are looking very pale. Call, if you need me; I shall be near at hand. Good-night." Pressing a burning kiss upon her forehead, before she was aware, he left her.

She tried to call out to him, but was unable to articulate a syllable; she started to follow him, but in attempting to arise to her feet she fell in a faint on the floor.

How long she lay there she had no means of knowing; but when she recovered consciousness, struggling to her feet, she turned out the gas-light that seemed to cast a weird glare over her surroundings, recalling with frightful vividness the words she had listened to so short a time before.

She staggered to the window, sank on the floor near it, and leaning on the casement, looked out where the moonlight spread so cold and still over the earth. There she remained until the moon ceased to hold its sway and the gray light of dawn had usurped its place. She recalled the days at Long Branch, and her cousin's last words to her, and wondered how her husband had learned that he would not marry her because she was poor; and if he had not loved her, why had he spoken to her as he had on that night of her marriage? Her cheeks burned as she thought of her cousin, and grew cold as she thought of her husband. All her life long she had built her hopes for happiness on the future, and just when she might have realized them, in a moment of bitterness she had wrecked all. Life now stretched out before her a barren waste, made desolate by herself!—a life of mockery,—without hope!—a brave, noble man for a husband, whose love could find

no echo in her own breast; for, though her cousin was unworthy of her love, she could not displace his image in her heart and enthrone another at will. She threw open the window that the breath of the morning might cool her fevered cheek, saying aloud, "I am unworthy of so good a husband, and such love as he bestows upon me; but I will endeavor, as far as lies in my power, to repay his kindness, and to make his life happy. I will try to make his home and myself attractive at all times to him and his friends; I will follow his wishes as far as I am able to divine them; I will play for him, sing for him, and try to make him forget his sorrow; and, though I can never love him, will seek to live worthy of his esteem." Then arising, she bathed her face, arranged her hair and dress, so as to leave no trace of her night's vigil, and went down-stairs.

It was quite early; yet in the pleasant breakfast-room she discovered her husband sitting near a window with a paper in his hands. He was not reading, however, for his eyes were looking out over the lawn, and his thoughts seemed far away.

He was very pale, and looked like death, sitting there so still, that Irene was startled. He seemed not aware of her approach until she laid her hand upon his shoulder, when he turned his face towards her with a quiet smile, as if he had expected to find her there all the while.

Silently she bent over and kissed him, and, immediately arising, he stood before her and looked inquiringly into her face, as if seeking an explanation of this unexpected caress.

"Frank," she said, in answer, "promise not to hate

me and I will try to make your life pleasant, and to return your affection; only have patience with me, please, and it will be easier. I am so sorry for the wrong I have done you, and sometime—sometime, soon, very soon, all may be as it should be."

Her voice had fallen so low he could scarcely distinguish the last words.

"Do not let us ever refer to the past again," he said, "but hope for the future. There, see, your trunks are coming already; will you have them taken to your room?"

"Yes," she replied, and herself led the way for the man who carried them,—the little trunk she had taken from home to the city and one great trunk that had belonged to her aunt, which contained the many pretty toilets she had given to her. Donning one of these, a house-dress of white cashmere with facings and trimmings of delicate pink silk, and rearranging her hair high on her head, in a fashion most becoming to her, she ran a silver dagger through the golden mass, and returned to the breakfast-room again. Her husband was no longer there. The paper lay on the floor where it had fallen when he had arisen to greet her, but he was nowhere to be seen. She walked through the parlors, carefully observing and examining all that they contained. Pausing before the piano, she touched its keys with her fingers, then sat down and played over softly a soothing melody.

"Irene!" She started and turned quickly. Her husband was standing in the archway between the parlors.

"Breakfast will be served now, if you are ready for it," he said. She arose and accompanied him. A

small bunch of flowers was by her plate, and the mulatto-woman with white cap and apron stood in attendance near by.

"Arsine," said Frank, addressing her, "this is your mistress. I hope you will strive to carry out her wishes and please her in everything."

"Yes, sir," answered the woman, as she bowed and grinned, showing two rows of white, even teeth, and left the room to fetch the breakfast.

Irene, taking up the flowers, bent her head over them, without speaking. The silence grew oppressive.

"I think you will like Arsine, as she comes to us very highly recommended. Through Miss Clark I heard of her," Frank said, at length.

"Miss Clark?"

"Yes, do you not remember her? She was with us that day on 'The Heights,'" his voice faltered.

"Yes, yes. I know who you mean now. It was very kind of her," said Irene, and there followed another period of silence.

She was scarcely able to keep back the tears, when the door opened suddenly and June came in, fresh and rosy, and with eyes sparkling with merriment.

"I came early to school so as to stop and see you on the way. Mamma said I might, if I wouldn't touch anything nor ask any questions."

Irene caught her in her arms and hugged her to her bosom; and the tears, that she had been trying so hard to keep back, fell copiously now as she kissed her. June stood abashed, unused to such an outburst of affection, and when Irene released her, looked regretfully into her sister's tear-stained face, saying,—

"Are you sorry I came? 'Cause if you are, I'll go right away again."

"No, no. I am glad. Don't you see, I'm crying for joy at the surprise and pleasure of seeing you here. Take off your hat, and bring a chair to the table, and have breakfast with us." She tapped the bell at her side, and told Arsine to fetch a plate, knife, and fork for June, and bade her eat, which the child did with hearty appetite, notwithstanding she had breakfasted at home only an hour before.

Conversation was easier now with June there. She seemed to remove the restraint, and laughed merrily as she talked and looked about between mouthfuls. After the meal was over, Frank handed a little key to Irene, saying, "This is a key to a drawer in the secretary, yonder. I had the lock made to order; and there are but two keys. I have one and this is the other. You will find there one of the essentials of housekeeping; and its contents will always belong to you, to do with as you like." She took the key, and understood that there was money in the drawer without need of looking inside, and he kissed her cheek as he passed out of the house and went to his office. She stood at the window looking after him until June pulling at her dress turned her attention by saying,—

"What a pretty dress; it makes you look like my big doll that Aunt Mollie brought to me." Then, thinking to please her sister, Irene took her about over the house, showing her the rooms and what they contained; all except one, the room next her own, which she attempted to open and found locked.

"What's in there?" queried June.

"Ghosts, I guess. I must find a key sometime and look in and see." After June had gone on her way to school, she gave her directions to Arsine for the day, and finished by saying,—

"I will attend to my own room myself, as it has always been my custom; but I shall expect you to care for the rest of the house." Then she went immediately up-stairs and tried the key of her own room in the door of the room adjoining. It fitted, and unlocking it she went within. It was comfortably furnished as a sleeping-room, containing the personal belongings of her husband, and told a silent story that brought pain to her heart; and she trembled as she went about putting things to rights, attempting to remove the air of loneliness that seemed to pervade. It was a sorry task, and brought so many sad reflections with it that she was relieved to get away into her own room again.

She found many things to take up her attention and divert her thoughts that day; and Minnie Barnes came in and made a long call, and Dora Clark a short one; then, in the evening, Marshall Bird dropped in and stayed some time. Irene played and sang while he was there, looking beautiful in a house-dress of pale lavender and white.

"I have enjoyed the evening more than I can say," he said to Irene as he was about to leave. "You are such an entertaining hostess, Mrs. Raynor, I am much afraid you will grow weary with my numerous visits; I shall want to come here so often."

"You cannot come too often; for Mr. Raynor—Frank—will be happier for your visits; he thinks so much of you," she replied.

"Ah, but in a new home, with a lovely woman for a constant companion, who sits enthroned in his heart, even an old friend may sometimes be *de trop*," he answered, pleasantly, as he bade them good-night.

"Why not ask him to come and live here with us? You are used to being together, and it will be pleasanter for you, will it not?" Irene inquired of her husband, after the minister had gone.

"Would you like to have him come?"

"Yes, very much," she answered, so quickly and earnestly that he wondered whether his company was so distasteful to her that she sought refuge in another's presence.

She thought only that he needed the companionship and sympathy of his friend to compensate for what was lacking in his wife.

"Very well, then," he answered; "I will ask him to come with us. Doubtless, he will be delighted with the idea."

The minister was grateful for his friend's suggestion, and was soon installed as a member of his household.

The meals thereafter were enlivened by his conversation, which was always light, agreeable, or instructive; and the evenings passed rapidly and pleasantly when he was present. He had an inexhaustible fund of entertaining stories, and his mind was well filled with knowledge of many subjects.

Old friends and people whom she had never known before, friends of her husband, came to call on Irene each day. She received every one with equal courtesy, dignity, and grace. Many came at first only out of respect to her husband, never thinking that they would

care to know his wife; but continued to call thereafter on her account mainly, and urgently invited her to visit them, so charmed were they all by her manner and welcome.

"I expected to find her crude, unfinished, and ignorant; but she is positively fascinating; a handsome woman; quite refined and cordial in manner; and she dresses always in such exquisite taste. I must confess to being agreeably disappointed in her," said one of these visitors to Dora Clark, one day, after having called on Irene.

"And did you think Frank Raynor would marry such an one as you expected to find?" inquired Dora.

"Men do such things, sometimes; and I had heard that her people were so common."

"Not common," answered Dora, as indignantly as if she were defending her own cause; "only plain people, who have never had the advantages of education and society that you have had."

Of all the visitors that came to her home, there was no one Irene welcomed more honestly and openly than Dora Clark.

"Come often, and informally, to see me,—you will be always welcome," she said, one day, to her as she was leaving.

"Thank you, I will gladly do as you suggest; for I feel as if I had a sort of claim on your home, somehow, since I had something to do with its first arrangement," she answered, cheerily; and thereafter did happen in often, sometimes for a few moments only, sometimes for an hour or two, and she brought a happy atmosphere with her visits.

Minnie Barnes, too, ran in continually on her way to and from school, smiling and talking idly and pleasantly all the while. Yet Irene found no enjoyment in her light talk and trifling gossip, but ofttimes was wearied not a little by it. She studied her now, weighed what she said, and wondered how she had ever found interest in her society and conversation, for Minnie followed her about the house, examining and criticising everything she saw, and asking curious questions in such a pleasant way as to compel an answer or invite offence, all the while retailing bits of unpleasant gossip that was current about people, even about Irene herself.

"You know I tell you these little things that no one else would ever think of telling you, because you are so happy and independent, and we understand each other so well, having always been such good friends, that you won't mind hearing them through me," she would say, by way of preface, and smilingly relate all the irritating, disagreeable things that she had heard from time to time while Irene was away and since her return, about her sudden marriage away from home, and her parents; and would ask all manner of questions about Count Beaurynski and her cousin, until Irene grew to dislike her, dreaded to see her come in at the door, and was not sorry when, taking offence because her visits were never returned, she ceased to come at all. Irene scarcely missed her, so thoroughly was she beginning to appreciate and enjoy the companionship of Dora Clark instead, who came in like a burst of spring sunshine, and said no evil of any one; whose words never carried a hidden sting, who never

indulged in gossip at any time, and whose presence lent encouragement always instead of disparagement. Weeks grew into months more rapidly than Irene could realize; and it was astonishing to her to discover how little she saw of her husband, and how rarely she saw him alone. She spent a great deal of her time in a room that she had fitted up for a studio, painting assiduously, and with more earnestness than ever before, being anxious to do some work in art that would sell, hoping thereby to derive an income, which would enable her to provide for her personal needs without the aid of her husband; wishing to free herself from any further dependence upon his bounty than was necessitated by her presence in his home. This desire increased as she became conscious that, instead of coming nearer to her husband, they were each day growing farther apart. He seemed to understand the false show of affection she had tried to keep up for a time, so she ceased it finally, and sought only to keep up the appearance of a happy married life before the world.

"Who would ever have thought that the daughter of John Patton would develop into such a charming and beautiful woman?" said one woman to another, in a crowded drawing-room, on the occasion of a reception given by a prominent citizen to a distinguished politician of the day. "Frank Raynor evidently knew what he was about when he married her; and they say there is not a happier couple in Newbridge!"

"Unfortunate Newbridge," thought Irene, who, standing near, overheard what was said; and she moved away, leaning on the arm of her husband, smiling pleasantly all the while, in spite of the pain in

her heart, seeking to keep up the semblance of so much happiness and of such a blissful married state.

"Mrs. Raynor grows lovelier each day; everybody is praising her beauty. How proud you must be of her!" said Dora Clark to Frank, later on the same evening. "She is so lovable, too. I want to be near her all the while, and fear I must weary her with my many visits; yet she is so happy always that I forget my cares and am made happy myself in her presence," she continued. Frank seemed abstracted and made no reply, so she turned away and left him to himself. Looking across the room to where Irene, with flushed and animated countenance, was conversing with the guest of the evening, he said to himself,—

"I believe she is happy. I have heard that women, many of them, are contented if only they may feed their vanity by adorning and beautifying themselves, so as to secure the admiration of society. It may be even so with her; she seems always smiling, and has worn nothing but white since I told her it was enhancing to her loveliness." And he frowned as he watched her.

She was dressed that evening in a long, trained robe of cream-white velvet,—no vestige of color about her save the delicate rose hue that came and went in her cheek. She wore about her neck a string of pearls that his mother had given her. He wondered why she wore them so constantly, coming, as they did, from his mother, since she cared so little for him; and decided that it must be because they became her so well. Turning about, finally, that he might not see her, he sought diversion in the conversation of a merry party of

friends near by, joining them with such a show of excited interest as quite surprised himself and them.

"Are you ready to go home?" said a low voice at his side a few moments later, as a hand was laid lightly on his arm. He knew it was Irene's before ever he turned and saw her face smiling up into his own. The others ceased talking at her approach, and looked on in quiet admiration. They envied him, no doubt, because of the semblance of what did not exist, he thought as he answered her,—

"I am ready to go, at your pleasure."

"Let us go now, then," she answered; and bowing to his friends, he walked away in her company.

When Irene reached the seclusion of her room that night, she sank into a chair in front of the mirror, and leaning forward, peered into it. She was no longer smiling, but by the glare of the gas-light in her face she could trace the pathway of furrows that were already beginning to form about her eyes and mouth, where the smiles went so often out and in.

"Not yet eighteen," she said, "and yet so disciplined to pain that I could listen and smile alike at mention of Robert Bostwick and the Count Beaurynski! Where, oh, where, am I drifting, and what is to be the end of it all! Must I go always through the world with my face happy and my heart aching?" She paced the floor excitedly, wringing her hands as she thought over the mockery of her present life, and tortured her mind with remembrances of her cousin, and his kisses and caresses. She had not heard of him, nor spoken his name, since the evening of her marriage, until to-night, when the guest of the evening had recalled having

seen her that summer at Long Branch in the same carriage with the Count Beaurynski; and when she told him that she had been spending that summer with her aunt, Mrs. Bostwick, he said he had known her uncle intimately, and took occasion to recount to her a brilliant success which his son had lately achieved in his profession. Every word of the recital was burned in her memory. It was a complicated case and concerned the settlement of a large amount of property. A college-mate of her cousin had been the one principally interested, and having a high estimation of his ability as a lawyer, had engaged him to represent him.

Forgetting her husband and all that she owed to him, she said, "More successes will follow this one; it is always the way; and, perhaps, had I waited, he would have overlooked my poverty, and I might have become his wife!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Irene and Frank had been married almost two years, Dora Clark came to live in their home. She had been invited to come, because Frank's presence was required out of the city a great deal, about that time, in looking after the interests of the road, and he wanted to feel that Irene had a congenial companion in his absence.

It was a great comfort for Irene to have this friend in her home; the minister even seemed happier for her presence, and never thought of seeking the seclusion

of his room while he was permitted to enjoy her society. She painted a little, too, and, at Irene's suggestion, brought an easel into the studio, and a portion of each morning they spent there together at work side by side.

She had been a member of their household but a short time when a new sorrow came into Irene's life. She was hurriedly sent for one night to come to her father's house, as her mother was dying. Some trouble of the heart, from which she had often before suffered, had suddenly and unexpectedly stricken her, and Irene arrived too late to see her alive. The sight of her father's grief was heart-rending.

"Do not let her die! save her! oh, save her for me! I cannot live without her!" he cried out continually, throwing himself upon the body, from which the life had already departed. It was some time before she succeeded in quieting him, and could induce him to go out of the room. Then taking tenderly the cold hands, hard and knotted with many years of toiling, she folded them across the lifeless breast. For the first time, in thinking of her mother, she did not recall her reprimands and severe discipline; but thought only of how much those hands had done for her; how they had smoothed the pillow of sickness, and held the needle many nights after days of hard work, while she was in bed asleep, preparing some garment of hers for the next day's wear; always toiling for her husband and children to the neglect of her own health and comfort. What wonder that she grew severe and hardened under the constant indifference that was shown to her in return; and why, oh, why, had she not thought over all these things before it was too late to show kindness

and appreciation, in return for the devoted self-sacrifice? She could think of nothing else, and her heart was troubled and her grief intense. It added to her distress to see her father, after the burial was over, go silently about the house, gently touching and caressing every article that had been his wife's handiwork, resisting all her appeals to him to come with her for a little while, unwilling to leave the home that her mother had shared with him. She wept with him, seeing no hope of consoling him, and remained there with him a few days, until he had become somewhat reconciled to his loss. Then she persuaded him to have a quiet family, old acquaintances of his with whom he could board, to take up their abode with him, and to permit her to take June home to live with her.

Frank found June a valuable addition to his family circle. They grew to be warm friends. They took long walks together, and he was constantly bringing home gifts to her such as pleased her childish fancy. Then she would watch at the window, when it was time for his home-coming, running out to meet him as soon as she caught sight of him, and it was a new and delightful experience for him to have some one watching for his coming. Often he had pictured to himself the loved face of his wife at the window waiting for his approach, but "the dreams" depart and "stern reality," unlike anything he had hoped for, had enacted quite a different part.

"I should think you would grow jealous of June; she takes up so much of your husband's attention, and he is always so willing to give it," said Dora Clark, laughingly, one day at the dinner-table.

"If she makes him happier, I am not jealous, but pleased," Irene answered. Frank looked up in surprise at her serious tone.

"Ah, I meant no offence. I was but jesting; but you—you are in earnest," said Dora, regretfully.

"Offence?" Irene laughed. "You did not offend me. I desire the happiness of every one, but my husband's most of all. If I seemed serious, it was because—because I was thinking at the same moment you spoke, of how much there is in life to promote happiness, and yet how few there are who secure it; and what hollow shams pass often for it."

"You speak so earnestly that were I not so well acquainted with your home, your husband, and your surroundings, therefore realizing to the contrary, I should think that you had not found it," said the minister, gayly.

"Was I so serious as that?" said Irene, smiling. "Well, I had in my thought one I have known for some time who is generous, sympathetic, forgiving, rich in friends, and comfortably endowed with this world's goods, yet most unhappy, and was wondering why that comfort should be denied to such an one and granted to many far less worthy."

"There are three distinctive elementary constituents of happiness which you have not accorded to your friend," answered the minister, calmly. "Contentment, religion, and love; by possessing any one of which, or all three, I think one may be truly happy."

"Do you really think so?" inquired Irene, thoughtfully. "Now, to my mind, contentment means monotony of existence, and is death to ambition and pro-

gression; religion necessitates seclusion from society or lack of congeniality in it; and love can never exist without the close companionship of jealousy and distrust,—which conditions would certainly mar perfect happiness, it seems to me."

"I will substantiate my statement by adding that no true happiness is to be found in society; that the ambitious person is never contented; the secluded, uncongenial person is not truly religious; and confidence stands as the chief sentinel in the heart where true love is. Few people, very few are truly happy; the multitude finding more fascination in the pursuit of happiness than in its realization," said the minister.

"I am sorry to interrupt this most interesting of conversations for even a moment, but shall be obliged to excuse myself now, as I am to leave the city within an hour and must make due preparations," said Frank, rising from the table.

"Can I be of any help to you?" inquired Irene, as he was leaving the room.

"No, thank you; continue the subject of your discussion without me; it is an excellent one and worth debating. I have only to arrange some papers."

All the while he was speaking June had been wiping her face and fingers on a napkin; and when he had finished, she ran quietly away from the table across the room to his side, saying,—

"May I help you?" He looked down on her upturned face for a moment, then laughingly replied,—

"Yes, you may help me, if you wish," and they left the room together.

"See, now, she has taken your place," laughed Dora, when the door had closed between them.

"Well, I do not object, do I?" answered Irene, a little peevishly, being vexed with her husband's final remark to her.

The conversation was not continued, and they all arose from the table shortly afterwards, Irene going to her own room and Dora and the minister to the parlor. Later in the evening, as Dora was going through the entry leading past Irene's room to her own, June came bounding out of her sister's room, running against her in her headlong course. She looked up quickly as in affright.

"Did you take me for a ghost?" said Dora.

"No," replied June. "There aren't any ghosts in this house,—Frank told me so. Irene said, once, that there were ghosts in there," pointing with her finger towards the door of the room next Irene's; "but there aren't; it is only his room, where he sleeps; that's all," and she ran on her way.

"It is very strange," murmured Dora to herself, as she pursued her way to her room, vainly attempting to solve a perplexing question to her entire satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I WONDER how much this picture would bring?" said Irene, half aloud, one morning, in the studio, as, with brush in one hand and palette in the other, she leaned back in her chair and scanned the canvas on the easel before her. The subject had been suggested by something she had seen in life,—"A Feast," she called it. It represented a young girl—with face copied from June's; her feet and arms bare, sunburned, and dirty; her dress ragged and hair unkempt—seated on a bank of green at the edge of a wood, a dog of common breed near by. She had broken apart a loaf of bread, and while eagerly devouring one portion, was holding out the other to the dog, who was feeding on it from her hand; both seeming to enjoy with keen relish the homely repast.

"Would you sell it?" inquired Dora.

"If I knew its worth and could find a purchaser."

"Why not send it to the Academy in New York, and place it on exhibition there, and see what would be offered for it?"

"I never once thought of doing that," said Irene, much pleased with the suggestion; and, leaving the studio, she at once wrote a letter to the directors of the Academy, and soon after, through correspondence, completed all preliminary arrangements for entering the picture at an exhibition of paintings by American artists, and having it offered for sale.

She did not communicate the plan, however, to her husband, feeling that he would not be pleased with it, and would offer some objection. She was worried in consequence, knowing that he ought to be told of it, though how to broach the subject to him she could not devise. She delayed telling him until the morning of the day the picture was to be shipped, when a man, whom she had engaged to box it up, came to the house for that purpose while the family were at breakfast.

"The carpenter has come, madame," said Arsine.

"The carpenter?" queried Irene, not understanding who was meant.

"It is the man you engaged to box up the picture, I guess," Dora ventured to explain.

It was unfortunate that Frank should first learn of its existence in this way; and Irene regretted with all her heart that she had not advised with him beforehand, as she answered,—

"Tell him to wait a few moments."

"Are you going to send away any of your work, Irene?" inquired Frank, pleasantly.

"Yes; a picture I have just finished. I am going to send it to the Academy of Design in New York, and let the outside world pass judgment on its merit. Would you not like to see it before it goes on its way?"

"Yes, if you please," he answered, calmly, though Irene could see that he was much disturbed.

"Well, come then,—you, too, Dora, and Mr. Bird,—and I will put it on exhibition in my studio," she said, rising from the table; "but you must promise not to be severe in your criticism of it, lest, at the

last moment, I waver from my purpose of sending it away."

"We will promise to be kind," answered the minister,—her husband making no reply whatever. Irene could see by the expression of his countenance, which he tried in vain to subdue, that he was not pleased, but appearing not to notice it, she led the way to the studio. It was the first time Frank had ever been there; and he gave a hasty glance about the room before permitting his eyes to rest on the picture he had come to see. When he did look on it, he exclaimed, in surprise,—

"Why, it is June's face!"

"Thank you. I am complimented that you so readily discern the likeness. Yes, June sat as a model for this," answered Irene.

"I had no idea you could paint so well, Mrs. Raynor! Is it to be sold?" said the minister.

A deep crimson suffused Irene's countenance. She dared not look at her husband as she made reply in a low voice, "If any one desires to purchase it," and drew a curtain across the canvas,—a signal for her guests to depart. As they were passing down the stairs, Frank walked by Irene's side, and said, in an undertone,—

"If you have not enough money to supply your wants, I will furnish you with more; you need not send your handiwork to market."

"Thank you, I have sufficient already. It is but a fancy of mine, to ascertain if the work I am doing is worth anything, and, if so, how much. I did not think you would object."

"I have not objected. Yet, I hope that you may be satisfied with this one experiment," he replied. Dora overheard this conversation as she came down the stairs in front of them, and it worried her not a little.

"It is certainly very odd that Irene should not have told him about the picture beforehand," she said to herself. "He does not wish her to send it away,—I am sure that he does not. Ought I, as a friend, to advise her to desist from her purpose? Ought I to tell her not to be indifferent to his wishes, and thus, perhaps, avert a future of unhappiness for both?" For some moments this good friend pondered over the question without arriving at any decision; finally allowing her thoughts to wander to a pair of blue eyes whose possessor sat opposite her, at the table, and looked so kindly across at her, to whom she was certain she would confide every purpose and intent of her life, were he to her what Frank Raynor was to Irene.

The picture was sent, and a letter was at the same time written by Irene to Mr. Wells, asking him to call at the Academy, if convenient, and fix a price on it. An answer came to this letter a short time after, and, as soon as Irene received it, she went up to the studio, where she might peruse it alone and undisturbed. It was late in the afternoon, and her husband was away from the city. He was absent a great part of the time, now, travelling about from place to place, with his secretary, in a special car. Sometimes he told her where he was going, sometimes he did not. She never made inquiry, however, for she knew he always told June, and June never forgot anything. She was surprised

when she read in the letter that the artist had valued the picture at two hundred dollars, and was gratified at the manner in which he spoke of her talent.

"You are the only pupil I ever had," he wrote, "and you do me much credit. I invited some friends of mine with me, one day, to look on your picture, and discovered that it was already ticketed 'sold.' I am proud to note your rapid progress; only do not misunderstand me. The picture is good; but after all, only a beginning; there is much room for improvement. You have taste and ability, and should work diligently for the achievement of what is within your reach. I seize this late opportunity of congratulating you on your marriage, and wish you much happiness and prosperity. Pray let me know if ever again I may serve you, as it will afford me pleasure to be of any assistance."

She read the letter with increasing enthusiasm, until she reached the clause where he made mention of her marriage. It set her to brooding over the past again; to recalling those happy, never-to-be-forgotten days in that other studio,—by the sea,—where life had passed like a happy dream; the kind, loving eyes that looked each day over her shoulder and never could see any fault in the picture on which she worked. Tears dropped from her lashes and rolled down over her cheeks on the letter she held before her. It grew dusk as she sat there by the window, crying thus quietly to herself, when the door opened, and Dora entered.

"Oh," she exclaimed, on seeing her, "I never expected to find you here at this hour!" Irene made no reply. "I left a book in here, to-day, that I wanted to

read just now,—you must excuse my intrusion on that account," she continued.

"It is all right," answered Irene, brokenly, the tears sounding in her voice.

"Why, what's the matter, dear?" said Dora, coming over to her side at once. "You are crying. Are you in trouble? and may I not comfort you?" She was down by Irene's side on the floor, and had her arms about her in an instant. On receiving such unexpected sympathy, Irene, leaning her head on her friend's shoulder, cried bitterly for a few moments before replying.

"There, I am better now. Don't mind me, Dora; I get to thinking seriously over my life sometimes, and as there has been more of shadow than sunshine in it, is it any wonder that I grow sad and low-spirited?"

"No, dear; only you must not think of the past; think only of the present and the future, and all that they promise for you; think of your husband, your home, your sister, and of how much happier you are than many, many who have to live all their lives without love, sympathy, comfort, and kindness in their homes; think——"

"Stop," interrupted Irene; "stop; don't say any more. I do think—too much! Come, let us light the gas—I hate the darkness—and I will read to you a letter I have just received; then we will go below and play and sing, and I will forget everything!" She jumped about excitedly, upsetting an easel, and stumbling over chairs in her haste, lighting the gas with trembling fingers; and finally seating herself to read aloud to her friend the artist's letter.

"And the picture is sold already! How fortunate! and who bought it, I wonder?" said Dora, when she had finished.

They did not know; how could they? It had been done so quietly,—that Frank Raynor, through an agent, had been the purchaser, and had ordered the picture to be sent, as soon as it could be removed, to his mother's home in Boston. But Irene gained new courage, because the picture had sold so soon, spent more time thereafter in her studio, and worked more diligently than ever.

"You paint as if your life depended on the success of what you are engaged on,—and the skill you must display," said Dora to her, one day, noting how carefully she applied the brush, and how completely engrossed she was in her occupation.

"It is my life; or rather no other pursuit or pastime has pleasure or interest for me now, save this!"

"You surely enjoy your home and its duties?"

"No, frankly, I do not. I wish I could forget them, ofttimes; only I am never able to,—but what am I saying? I mean, of course, I am not domestic in my tastes. I care more for the world than home, do you understand? I should much prefer passing all my days in society, to the seclusion of home-life without some agreeable occupation like this to take up my thoughts." The studio door was ajar; and her husband, in passing outside, overheard what she was saying. He wanted to hear more, but could not demean himself by listening.

"Oh, Irene, I grieve to hear you speak thus; because I am sure your husband prefers the quiet of home," said her friend.

"Oh, no; you are mistaken; he, too, prefers society. You would scarcely think it, would you?" she answered.

Dora did not reply. She was unable to understand Irene. The longer she lived in her home, and the more she saw of her, the less she seemed to know her. Yet, as she observed her friend's husband she read plainly in his every look, word, and action that his married life was a disappointment, and that he was restless and unsatisfied. That he loved his wife, she never doubted; but she believed that Irene was neglecting him, thinking too much of art and not enough of home. Often she wanted to talk with her and warn her of the mistake she was making, only she had put it off from time to time, not knowing how to begin.

Three years had passed since Frank and Irene were wedded. Three years, and they were no nearer together. Irene scarcely ever saw her husband alone. He was away much of the time, and when he was at home he seemed scarcely to notice her presence, so indifferent had he apparently grown towards her. At first he had been over considerate of her comfort and happiness, now he frowned oftener than he smiled, though always courteous and polite. At first she had been relieved at his increasing indifference, and was grateful when he left her to herself; but after a time it troubled her; and she was pained as she noticed that, when he was laughing and talking gayly with June, he would instantly grow sober at her approach, make some petty excuse for leaving her presence, or take up a book or paper and read.

"I believe he is growing to hate me," she said to herself, one day, piqued by his demeanor. The thought

worried her. She wondered if they would have been happier now had they begun differently; had they tried to live for each other instead of the world; had they kept by themselves instead of admitting outsiders into their household.

Often, when feeling in such a mood, she would take June by the hand and go down to her father's home to talk with him until she should feel better. He lived a quiet life, much given to recalling his past in fancy. He had never been the same man after the loss of his wife; but, if left to himself, would often sit for hours with an old pipe between his lips, smoking and weeping and giving himself up entirely to thoughts of her.

He loved to talk about her to any one, and most of all to his children. Tenderly he would speak of her efforts in their behalf, in her endeavor to secure their comfort, when they were too young to appreciate them. Over and over again he would recall the babyhood of Irene, telling how her mother had sat up one time night after night, working all the days beside, while nursing her through a dangerous illness.

"You was always a sickly one," he would say to Irene; "and many a night's sleep she sacrificed for your sake." And Irene would think that it would have been better for many others besides herself, had her mother not been so watchful over her through that illness. Yet, though the scenes her father recalled were distressing and his conversation sad, she always returned home feeling better for having gone to see him, losing sight of her own sorrow somewhat in trying to comfort him.

CHAPTER XX.

"On the first of the year we will move to New York," said Frank to Irene, one day, as they were alone together.

"What!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. He repeated what he had said.

"What will you do there?" she inquired, in a calmer tone.

"Live, I suppose, as I do now." Irene winced at the sarcasm that pervaded his answer; and he went on to say,—

"I overheard you, one day, telling Miss Clark how much you loved society; and as there is very little that is pleasant in Newbridge, I thought in New York you would be happier."

Irene tried in vain to recall what else she had said that time before saying,—

"But what are you going to do there? What business shall you be engaged in, I mean?"

"I have been corresponding with my father's old friend, Mr. Blaisdell, the gentleman to whom I owe my present position, with a view of obtaining an office in the company of which he is president, and the result is even more favorable than I had dared to anticipate; for, through his influence, I have been made one of the vice-presidents of the same company, and allowed a salary large enough to permit us to live very

comfortably in New York. It is a piece of extraordinary good fortune; though he says he has been watching my career here in Newbridge, and believes me capable of filling the office with credit, and that he promised my father, who was his dearest friend, to advance me as I deserved. I never knew of such enduring affection as is his for my father. Friendship usually dies out in forgetfulness after death, if it ever survives through life," he added, thoughtfully.

"It is certainly very considerate of him to remember even a dead friend's son so generously as he has you," Irene replied.

"I think so too, for this position is one of influence and responsibility." Irene was looking up at her husband admiringly as he spoke. Never before had he appeared so well in her eyes as now, and she was proud to have him so highly appreciated. Suddenly she went towards him, and putting both her arms about his neck, kissed him twice and thrice upon the lips, saying, as she did so,—

"Oh, Frank, I am so proud to know of this change in your prospects!" He blushed like a school-boy; and had not recovered from his surprise at this unlooked-for caress, when the door of the parlor opened, and the minister entered. Irene disengaged herself at once from his arms that were just entwining about her, and turning towards Mr. Bird, exclaimed,—

"Only listen to what Frank has been telling me! That we are to go to New York to live next month!"

"Going to New York? Why, how is that? Of course, I am not included in 'we,' am I?" said the minister.

"Certainly not,—unless, of course, you wish to be. Tell him about it, Frank," she said, turning towards her husband, who was standing as she had left him, the color gone from his face and his lips. One thought, one idea, was coursing through his mind; that was, "it is the city, society, and the world she cares for and rejoices over, not me,—not me." And the hope, almost smothered from being suppressed so long, that had sprung into new life, as her lips touched his of their own accord, died down again as she turned from him, and his face grew pale and hard. At Irene's request he, with an effort summoning back his customary calmness and reserve, related for his friend's benefit the story of his advancement in business.

"You deserve your success, old friend. May God bless and prosper you always," said the minister, grasping Frank's hand heartily in his own. Irene, startled by the change she had discovered in her husband's expression, quietly left the room while he was talking.

It was the middle of December, and for many months had the little family beneath the roof of Frank Raynor's home been coming together in daily converse and association; and all the while two hearts had been closing against each other, while right by their sides, two hearts were opening up and warming towards each other.

Are you surprised to know that the minister brightened up and grew to enjoy listening to the tones of a woman's voice that brought good cheer with them to every one? Are you surprised that he recognized and appreciated the generous nature, the sympathetic heart,

and the helping hand of one whom he saw daily, whose soul shining forth through her eyes was beautiful, though her face was plain? On the evening of the same day that Frank had told him of the future change he was about to make in his plans, when he found Dora and himself alone together in the parlor, he told her how their home with Frank and Irene was about to be broken up, and seeing her face sadden at the news, besought her to join him in making a home for themselves, for the rest of their lives; and this kind, loving woman, just fitted to become a minister's wife, joyfully gave her consent.

Without delay they confided their newly-found happiness to the friends under whose roof they had been led to foster their affection for each other, and as Frank and Irene congratulated them, and wished them joy in the future, they realized more than ever before what a complete failure their own life together had been, and what a wide breach was forming between them.

Much of the time that preceded her departure was spent by Irene in her father's company. She experienced much difficulty in persuading him to part with June, but Frank could not bear the thought of being deprived of the child's society, and urged that she be taken with them. So Irene argued with him that June needed a woman's watchful care, until she gained his consent to her going. When the final parting came, however, his distress was pitiful to behold, and great tears rolled down his cheeks, as reluctantly he let go the child's hand.

"You are young yet, and it's all for your happiness;

and I'll—I'll get used to not seeing you about, I suppose, though it goes hard to part with you," he said sorrowfully.

A quiet wedding ceremony had been performed in their home just a week before Frank and Irene bade adieu to it, when the minister took to himself for wife our good friend Dora Clark; and it was planned that they should continue to live in Frank's house just as it was for a time. They went to the train to see their friends off on their journey.

"It seems like separating a family," said Dora, sadly.

"You will be happier by yourselves, though," Irene answered. Apparently not heeding what she was saying, Dora continued,—

"We will always remember that we owe our present happiness to you both; for in bringing us so constantly together, you led us to love each other. We will think kindly of you always, and miss you very much; so you must return to us often as brother and sister, for you seem to be so related to us."

Irene kissed her father tenderly many times before entering the car, deeply grieved at thought of leaving him. Through the car-window she could see his tottering form go down the street alone under the gas-light. At every step he turned and looked back, wiping his eyes on his handkerchief. Tears of real anguish flowed from her own eyes in sympathy for him as she realized how lonely and desolate his home would now be.

It was the last time she ever saw him.

The journey was a tedious one to her; and she was glad when it was ended. Glad, also, to be in New

York, where there would no longer be any necessity for keeping up an outward show of domestic happiness for the sake of misleading her friends, for the people whom they were likely to meet with now would never notice or care whether they were happy or not.

They engaged a pleasant suite of rooms in a hotel; and, the morning after their arrival, Frank left her and June there, while he went to meet Mr. Blaisdell, suggesting that she write a note to her aunt and invite her to call on her. Irene did as he advised, sent the note by messenger, and then sat by June's side at the window, and looked out on Broadway, watching the crowds of people that were thronging that busy thoroughfare. She never heeded June's many exclamations and questions; being engrossed with remembrances of the past, which her presence in the city revived. She wondered what she would do on meeting her cousin again, for encounter him sooner or later she knew she must.

These thoughts were interrupted by her aunt's arrival. She came in with a great flourish, and almost smothered Irene with her many caresses, all the time talking as rapidly as she could articulate. She had laid aside all symbols of mourning and now seemed gayer than ever before, looking almost as young as her niece.

"It is lovely to think that you are to live in New York," she said, after exchanging greetings with both Irene and June. "But why did you not tell me of your coming beforehand? I should have met you at the train and insisted on taking you home with me, instead of permitting you to stop at a hotel. And to think Mr.

Raynor should receive such a brilliant appointment, living away out there in seclusion as he did in Newbridge! I knew all the while that he was a capable man and bound to rise, or I never would have encouraged your marrying him, my dear. And you have grown more beautiful than ever; you will surely create a furor in society, if you manage rightly. I will introduce you at my house some time this month; but let me whisper a secret to you before I forget it. I am to be married in the fall to Mr. Gubenhauser,—he is abroad now,—a German! Ah, yes, you can tell that by the name, of course. I hesitated quite a while before accepting him on account of the name. A widower, too, without encumbrances, having no end of money; and he just dotes on me. Love him? The idea of my falling in love with any one at my age! Oh, dear, no; but he is nice-looking, of respectable family, and very rich. What more could I desire? I have always had a perfect horror of being poor, you know; have been obliged to give up two servants already; though it's perfectly wonderful what success Robert has been meeting with; he is just as busy, and makes as much money as many of the first and oldest lawyers in the city; and, I must confess, he has been very generous and kind to me. But, dear me, if he marries, his wife would change all that; so I thought it was safe to secure a rich husband while I might."

"Is he about to marry?" Irene inquired.

"Who,—Robert? Well, I can't tell. I've been expecting him to marry for the past three years, yet he doesn't; and yet he may bring a wife home any day. One never knows what to expect from these young

men; they marry at a moment's notice, often,—you remember how it was with your husband, my dear."

Irene did not make any reply, but turned her face away from her aunt.

"Do you realize how remarkable it is that your husband should be appointed to the place he has come hither to fill?"

"No; it is not remarkable. He deserves it, and is capable of fulfilling all its requirements," Irene replied.

"Yes; I don't doubt that, of course; but yet we do not always get what we deserve in this world. You must see the papers containing the announcement; quite a little bit of family history dished up for reading at the same time, too."

"What do you mean?" inquired Irene, anxiously.

"Oh, his family history,—not yours, of course,—about his father, you know! He used to be a great railroad magnate in his time; but he failed, and lost everything, poor man! I have saved the papers, and you can read for yourself. But put on your wraps, now, both of you, and come out for a short ride with me. My sleigh is at the door, and the roads are in excellent condition. Afterwards, you can stop at my house and take luncheon with me. Yes, you must lunch with me, both of you; I will take no excuses, for I shall be all alone otherwise. Robert does not come home during the day; indeed, of late, he rarely comes to his meals at all. How June has grown! You will send her away to school, of course, when you are settled. It is such a nuisance to have a child around when you are giving attention to society,—and every-

thing favors your becoming a great belle, if you but give proper attention to society. Are you ready? Dear me, I have been here an hour! Who would have believed it!" And she bustled out of the room, talking lightly and gayly all the while.

They took a short drive about, and returned to Mrs. Bostwick's home in time for luncheon. Scarcely had they taken their places at the table, however, when Robert entered the room. He had come home unexpectedly at that hour for the purpose of packing a small valise, and to tell his mother that he was obliged to leave the city for a short time in the interests of some business he was attending to.

He paused at the threshold, turning white and red as he saw Irene; then, advancing towards her, extended his hand in friendly greeting. Both hands trembled perceptibly as they touched; he turned towards June, who was presented to him, eagerly talking with her until he had regained his self-possession. When the meal was over, they went into the parlor, when Mrs. Bostwick excused herself to get the papers she had promised to show Irene. June went over to the window to look out in the street, and Robert approached where Irene was seated on a sofa and sat down by her side, saying,—

"Irene, I want to beg your forgiveness—now, at this late day—for my cruelty the last time we were together. I would have written to you and besought it ere this, but was not able to address you in the name of another. I ask you now to pardon me, on account of what I have suffered in the years since."

She attempted to answer him, but seemed to have

lost all power to speak. Arising, she turned her face away that he might not observe her agitation.

He caught her hand, and held it tightly in his own to prevent her from leaving him.

"Irene, Irene, do not turn from me,—do not despise but forgive me, for the sake of the love that I bear you!"

"Robert," she answered, haughtily, as she snatched her hand from his, "you are forgetting yourself." A half-stifled moan escaped him. She heard it, and immediately reproaching herself for her severity, said,—

"You are not the only one who has suffered! Be considerate. Do not add more bitterness to my life. I forgive,—yes; only, if you ever cared for me, do not again refer to the past." She left him, and went over to where June was standing by the window. When her aunt came back and she turned to meet her, he was no longer there.

On returning to the hotel that afternoon she found her husband waiting for her in their private parlor. He looked so handsome, and smiled in welcome of her so trustfully, that she felt a tinge of self-reproach for having listened to her cousin, and for having spoken to him as she did. But the words could not now be recalled. In a moment of weakness she had forgotten the requirements of her position, and been ruled entirely by the dictates of her feelings.

"We were with Aunt Mollie," she said, quickly, in explanation of her absence.

"I hope you passed the time pleasantly with her," he said.

"Yes. We went to drive, and took luncheon with her afterwards."

"Do you know Aunt Mollie and Robert?" inquired June.

"I know Aunt Mollie?—yes; but Robert?—no." He looked towards Irene, inquiringly.

June went on to say, "He is our cousin, you know?"

"Oh, to be sure. I had forgotten all about him. Irene has never spoken of him in my presence."

"No," Irene answered quietly, wondering whether he had expected her to talk of her cousin, knowing, as he did, of her love for him. She succeeded in changing the conversation by referring to her aunt's prospective marriage; and from that subject they drifted into a discussion of their plans for the future.

They had been in New York but a few days, when they moved from the hotel into a pleasant apartment in the vicinity of Mrs. Bostwick's home, after having furnished and fitted it up in artistic and elegant manner. Soon after they were established in their new abode they made their first appearance in society, at a reception given by Mrs. Bostwick.

Irene attracted much attention on that occasion by her simple grace and beauty. She wore a becoming evening costume of cream-white plush, with her neck, arms, and shoulders bare, looking as if chiselled from marble, in their whiteness and perfectness. She wore no jewelry or ornaments save the string of pearls about her neck; and at her corsage a cluster of delicate pink roses, the only vestige of color about her.

"Who is she?" was the inquiry of one who had not met her.

"She is Mrs. Bostwick's niece. Three seasons ago she attracted much notice at Long Branch," was the answer.

"But she seems very young!"

"Oh, she is young. This is her husband standing close to my right—Mr. Raynor. He is the newly-appointed vice-president of the —— railroad company. You have doubtless read of him in the papers. His father was at one time officially connected with the same company. A fine-looking man, is he not?"

"Yes; but he seems much older than she."

"She was married the same season she was at Long Branch. I remember, we all thought she would capture the Count Beaurynski,—he was so devoted in his attentions to her."

Frank, who had overheard the last remark, moved away, unwilling to listen further, and went over to where Irene—leaning on her cousin's arm—was conversing with Mr. Wells. He was not aware that it was the artist until he approached; and Irene, looking up in his face in a fascinating manner, placed her hand on his arm, and, turning towards him, said,—

"Mr. Wells, allow me to present to you my husband. He has heard me speak of you quite frequently, and knows how greatly I am indebted to you." Somehow his heart beat quicker as she spoke thus; and he grasped the hand of the artist more fervently than ever before he had taken the hand of a stranger, though he scarcely heard a word that he was saying, or realized what he himself was replying; his wife's manner, the touch of her hand on his arm, and the sound of her sweet voice saying "my husband" having quite over-

come him for the time, so new and so endearing was the experience.

Irene had been dreading all evening lest her cousin, to whose charge she had been confided by her aunt immediately after her arrival, should make some reference to the past in his talk with her; but he never broached the subject in any way, speaking only the current small talk of the day. She could not overcome the fear that he might, however; and, therefore, with joy, noted her husband's approach, knowing that she could be free from such dread in his company, and while under his protecting presence; moreover, she had grown proud of hearing his name mentioned so frequently and with such apparent esteem, by many of those assembled, and welcomed the opportunity for presenting him to her friend, the artist.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself this evening," Frank said, while assisting her to remove her wraps as they stood in their own parlor on their return home. He had been very proud of her, and the remembrance of her smile, gesture, and the words 'my husband,' were yet thrilling him, and he was anxious to afford her the opportunity for saying more while the mood was with her. Her reply came, after a moment's pause, during which her face grew very serious.

"No; I cannot say that I have;" and taking up her wraps, she added a chilling "good-night" at the doorway, and left him. That was all. He might have mistaken the meaning of her words, but he could not misunderstand her manner; and as he stood where she left him, he recalled how many times he had heard her name and the Count Beaurynski's spoken together

that evening, and fell to brooding over his unhappiness.

Was he condemned to live always thus, unloved by his wife, until death should put an end to such life? If her love was as enduring as his own, there was no other hope for him. It was a terrible future to look forward to; and he nervously paced the floor until day was breaking.

Irene heard him as he retired to his room, just before dawn, and guessed what he was suffering.

"He is troubled because of my cousin," she said. "Ah me, what will he do? and how shall I ever be able to live peaceably here in the city, encountering him so often as I must!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE Count Beaurynski was again in New York, though Irene was not aware of his presence until she met him unexpectedly one evening at a reception given by Mrs. Bolingbroke, at which her husband and herself were in attendance. Had she known that he was to be one of the guests she would have sought to avoid him, but she did not know. They had gone to Mrs. Bolingbroke's—her husband and herself—in company with her aunt and cousin, and immediately upon entering the crowded drawing-room Frank had tendered his arm to her aunt, resigning her to her cousin's charge. She was annoyed by this action of his, and

likewise puzzled; yet, as there was no escape, she took her cousin's arm, and sought to fortify her position by meeting all his advances with a quiet appearance of indifference and an unmistakable show of annoyance; for on several like occasions before, when she had been thus thrust into his company, he had attempted to play on her feelings and to advance himself in her affections, and in consequence she had come to look on him with increasing distrust.

This evening, while they were together, he was about to lead her into the conservatory, which was vacated by every one else at the time, when she stopped suddenly at the entrance, saying,—

"Let us turn back."

"No; let us go in here a moment. I have something I must say to you that I do not wish others to hear." His whole frame trembled. She almost knew what he wanted to say, and answered him with poorly-repressed excitement,—

"But you must not say anything to me that the whole world may not hear. Do you not see my husband standing there looking towards us? He knows I —I loved—you—once, and yet he trusts me implicitly in your company. What would he think if he knew I would listen to what you are now wanting to say?"

"Irene, you are excited. You do not understand. I meant no wrong. But how does he know of the feeling you have for me? Surely you have not told him?" he inquired, nervously.

He is a coward, she thought, as she answered him,—

"You talk with much assurance when you speak of the feeling I 'have for you,' and do me a great wrong

and injustice thereby. Look!" she said, pointing with her fan in the direction where her husband was. "There stands my husband, whom I respect, honor, and esteem more than any man I know. Take me to him at once."

He would have detained her and made excuses, but she pressed him forward, and would not permit him.

"Forgive me, Irene, and have mercy on me. Your treatment of me of late has been most inconsiderate and cruel," he said, in a low voice, as they proceeded. She never seemed to hear what he was saying, but pushed on his arm all the while, as if to bring him more quickly forward.

Her husband was watching her approach. When within a few paces of him her progress was impeded by her hostess, who approached them leaning on the arm of a gentleman, and said,—

"Ah! Mrs. Raynor, will you not stop long enough to recognize an old admirer of yours?" Irene paused and looked for the first time towards Mrs. Bolingbroke's companion. It was the Count Beaurynski. In an instant the flush that had mantled her cheeks left them; and without extending her hand or speaking a word to him, she bowed low in recognition, and explaining that she was ill, by way of excuse to her hostess, pressed eagerly forward to her husband's side.

"I am not well; let us go home," she said, clinging to his arm with the look of a hunted fawn. He had been watching her as she had come towards him, had noted her agitation on meeting her hostess and escort; and having learned that the Count Beaurynski was present, he inquired, without seeming to heed what she had just said to him,—

"Who was the gentleman with Mrs. Bolingbroke?" feeling certain what her answer would be, yet almost losing command of himself when she replied, in a low voice,—

"The Count Beaurynski."

"I knew it!" he exclaimed beneath his breath, as he left the room with her, turning at the door-way to catch a glimpse of the man's face whom he believed to have wrecked his happiness. With indignation he observed the Count's eyes intently following his wife, an expression in them full of hidden meaning, and entirely unintelligible to him.

"Irene, hereafter try to remember that you are my wife, and conceal your feelings in public, at least, if you are not able to rid yourself of them entirely," he said, in a severe tone, as he left her that night at the door of her room. She was amazed at his tone and manner as much as at his words, it being the first time in their married life that he had spoken other than kindly to her. Evidently, he had been noting the expression of her face while she talked with her cousin, and had mistaken her agitation on meeting the Count for the effect of her conference with him. Often he had told her that he could read in her face what was passing in her mind. That might be possible for him if she were near; but she had been too far away for him to read aright, and he had evidently misunderstood her. And why should he censure where he himself was to blame, throwing her constantly in her cousin's society as he did, disregarding the fact that the temptation to say much that was better left unspoken would surely present itself to them? What did he hope to

gain by this course? He would never seek to secure an end to his unhappy domestic experience by bringing dishonor in his home; so it must be that he sought only to show her that his confidence in her was unbounded, and he was now vexed because he believed that confidence had been betrayed. How could he think so poorly of her! She felt an increasing contempt for her cousin whenever she thought of him.

The passion that had so long held full sway in her heart was being gradually dethroned by his persistent attentions to her, and the cowardly presumption and calm assurance he displayed in her presence; and the seed sown, from time to time, in quiet acts of tender thoughtfulness and regard that had honor, love, and respect to nourish them, though retarded in their development by the blind conquering sway of that false passion, were springing up into an enduring sentiment, which though not yet recognized by her was surely driving all consideration for her cousin headlong into obscurity.

Poor Irene, she was young yet, unused to the diplomacy of the world and society, and, above all, not able to understand and interpret her own heart aright.

She cried herself to sleep that night, and wakened in the morning determined not to permit herself thereafter to be thrust so continually into her cousin's company; and when she could not avoid him, to show to her husband that she was able to meet him without the slightest betrayal of emotion or regret. They had accepted an invitation to a theatre party for the evening following the reception; but late in the afternoon Frank came home complaining of a severe headache.

"How unfortunate!" said Irene, regretfully. "You will not be able to attend the play, then, this evening."

"No, I think not; but you can go in company with your aunt and cousin without me." Irene's lips quivered perceptibly as she answered,—

"If my husband is ill, my place is by his side."

"Ah, yes, to be sure; but one is not counted ill with a headache. You could say, and they would understand, that I prefer to be alone." He laughed sarcastically.

"But I do not care to go to-night," she replied, stung by his manner.

"Oh, then, that is another matter; suit your own pleasure always, Irene." He seemed not like himself, and annoyed at the tone he used, she answered with spirit,—

"It is because I do not wish to go without your company."

"Oh, that is it? Then you would like to go? Well, leave me by myself awhile; perhaps by the time we will need to start I may feel better and able to accompany you."

"No, no," she answered, vehemently; "I will not go to-night; do you understand me? I will send a note of regret and explanation at once."

"As you please," he answered, quietly, and she left the room.

He had read in the society notes of the morning paper that the Count Beaurynski was to be one of the party, and had determined to remain at home rather than meet him. He had a slight headache, not severe enough, however, to have kept him away, other-

wise. But he felt an aversion for this foreigner which he could scarcely account for.

He would have hesitated to acknowledge that it was because the Count was loved by his wife, yet he felt certain that, were he thrown too closely in his company, he would offer some insult to him, so preferred to avoid him.

"Can I do anything to bring you relief?" inquired Irene, returning a few moments later to him.

"No, thank you; I want only to be alone and quiet," he answered, shortly; so she left him again.

He wanted "to be alone and quiet," yet he called June into the room after she had gone, and was laughing and talking merrily with her a few minutes later.

Irene was sorely troubled, thinking he found so little pleasure in her society, that he resorted to strategy to relieve himself of it. Once he had loved her; once he had told her he could never outgrow his affection, and yet in three short years, and little more, —just at a time when she was beginning to appreciate him and to find comfort in his companionship,—he had evidently wearied of her, and grown to dislike her.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mr. Blaisdell, who had been in poor health for many months prior to Frank's coming to New York, gradually declined after he came, being finally confined to his house entirely. Frank visited him frequently, anxious to serve him if it might be in his power. He conferred with him on business, or read to him, or talked with him cheerily, eager to relieve the monotony of his illness. Mr. Blaisdell, in consequence, became very warmly attached to him; and when the summer was opening, and his physician advised him to seek the sea-breezes, he invited Frank to bring his wife and her sister, and spend the season with him at Long Branch, where he owned a cottage. Frank hesitated at first, but, being very strongly urged, and finding Irene well pleased with the plan, he finally accepted the invitation.

Mr. Blaisdell was quite old, very wealthy, and a bachelor, and was accustomed to spending his summers quietly at this home by the seaside, with only the companionship of his sister, a maiden lady older than himself. She went there with him this season, though also an invalid, not able to go about.

On account of this she was no companion for Irene; so, as Frank went each morning into the city, returning late in the afternoon, Irene sought Mr. Blaisdell's society much of the time, and tried to show her appreciation of his kindness to her husband by reading aloud

to him as he lay in a reclining-chair by the window of his room, which looked out on the sea, thereby endeavoring to make the hours pass pleasantly for him.

What was begun thus as a duty came afterwards to be a pleasure to her; and the old man found so much comfort in her society that he sought to keep her near him when she would become weary of reading, by relating to her many of his early experiences. Irene enjoyed those talks of his, and recalled them many times later in life with much keener appreciation than at the time. June was often with him too; for he seemed to delight also in the child's company, saying that her merry face was as invigorating to him as summer sunshine.

"Enjoy the spring-time of your life, my child," he said once to her; "it is the happiest season of your existence, when life seems full of brightness and the air full of music for you, and care and pain, when they approach, touch you so lightly that you shed a few tears and thereby wash away all remembrance of their stings. Run out and play there on the sand now, for you need the air to keep you merry, and I will watch you from the window here, and renew my youth again in enjoying the sight of your bright face there." Then, as June ran gayly laughing away, he looked after her with sparkling eyes, and, turning to Irene, continued, "She is so happy always, while you seem often sad. You should not be so, with life before you and such a noble man for a husband. You have much to delight in. Why do you so rarely smile? I have noticed you at times when you were pleased. A smile sits well on your features and adds new charm to your

beauty; besides, you are too young yet to burden yourself with cares. How old are you?"

"I will be twenty next August. I do not mean to appear serious, having nothing to make me so."

Did the old man suspect a falsehood, or was it only by accident that he said,—

"Look out there at June now; she has made friends with those strange children already, and they are as happy together as if they had known each other all their lives. When she is older—but a few years older—she will stand aloof and look critically and suspiciously over each article of dress that the young girls whom she meets will wear, and note their movements, conversation, and manners, and what others have to say of them, for days and weeks before she will make friends of them. It is always the way: we grow distrustful as we grow older. Why is it, I wonder? It may be because, with the curiosity and inquisitiveness of childhood, we easily discover the deceit practised by those older than ourselves, and in much the same way as a man buckles on his sword in going to a contest of swords, so we, when we grow old enough to engage in the diplomacy and deceit of business or society, put on the same armor and use the same weapons we are certain to encounter there. It is different with children: they never know distrust until they have become acquainted with deceit,—the two go hand in hand,—so they make friends readily. Their quarrels are soon ended and forgotten. But as they grow older their ideas and friends change, and they are continually dropping off old ones and taking up new. I look on it as a kind of fruitless search after constancy and

sincerity. Where now are the friends of my childhood? Gone,—forgotten. Rarely we cling to them through life. One, one only, did I retain. That one was your husband's father."

He paused to brush off a tear from his cheek; he was very weak, and the recollection of former days affected him.

"You knew his father well?" inquired Irene, eagerly.

"Ah, yes; we were boys together and grew up almost under the same roof, I might say, we were so much in each other's company. He was a grand man; every one esteemed him; upright and honorable he was to the last; but he lacked that penetration necessary to the man of the world in dealing with its serpents. He thought all men were honest like himself. He grew rich, but, being ambitious to increase his possessions for the sake of his son, at the suggestion of an acquaintance he undertook to speculate in mines, and acting on the advice of this acquaintance lost everything. It was all done so quickly, and as his chief adviser who had been on the verge of bankruptcy grew rich at the same time that he grew poor, I have never been able to believe but that a plan had been arranged beforehand whereby to profit by his confidence. I never could make him think it, however. 'I made a mistake. I should have known better,' he said, when everything had been sacrificed; 'but I thought I could make something out of it and do more for Frank. Now, poor boy, he has nothing to begin on. If you can do aught for him, do it for the sake of old acquaintance.' Those were his last words to me. Ah me, what a

treacherous world it is! Will you please roll my chair away from the window? I will try to doze a little now, for I am tired and so are you, I fear, with my much talking. You can send my man here to me while you run out on the beach with June: it will do you good."

She rolled his chair away as he requested, and, when she had arranged the pillows under his head so that he should be more comfortable, she said,—

"May I ask one question before I go?"

"A dozen, if you wish."

"How could Frank's father be imposed upon so easily? He was a shrewd business man, was he not?"

"Ah, you doubt the subtlety of those who led him on? You know already the man to whom he owed his failure was your uncle, Robert Bostwick? Yes, child, Frank's father was a shrewd business man in his own way. He knew all about railroads and their management, but nothing of mines; and invested a portion of what he had from time to time until, growing desperate, he finally risked all, hoping to save what had already been invested. I think their constant talking and his thinking over the subject turned his head towards the last, or he never would have ventured so far. Your uncle was not alone in the enterprise, but had a partner, who did most of the talking and was as tricky as himself. Robert Bostwick, Jr., inherits some of his father's subtleness, I think, for, as I have noted his career from time to time, I have come to think he is not always honest in his dealings. Perhaps I may be prejudiced, however, and hence mistaken."

"Thank you. I will leave you now if you are comfortable," Irene said, and went out on the beach to where her sister was playing.

"Come, June," she said, after she had watched her idly for a time, "let us go into the house and write a letter to papa; we have not written to him for almost two weeks; he is lonesome no doubt without us, and we must not forget or neglect him because we are happy."

June readily assented, and when she was comfortably ensconced by Irene's side, with pencil in hand, she looked up into her face and saw tears glistening in her eyes.

"You are crying; are you happy for sure?"

"Yes, dear, only a little tired."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mrs. Bostwick was not long in following her niece to Long Branch, where she stopped at one of the hotels with her son. The Count Beaurynski came also, not with them, yet stopping at the same hotel where they were quartered. Irene encountered all three wherever she went, it seemed to her. She always recognized the Count whenever she could not avoid meeting him, because her aunt advised her to do so lest the world of society, the same that knew she was once friendly with and much admired by him, should notice that she slighted him now, and, not able to divine the cause, invent one of its own.

"The women are jealous of you already, my dear,—so frightfully jealous,—because you are young and beautiful, and because every one admires and praises you always. They will be glad to find some occasion, though ever so slight, for gossip about you. Of course, it will not be pleasant for you to speak to him, nevertheless it will be policy." So had her aunt argued; and Irene bowed coldly to him, thereafter, whenever they met, and he never intruded himself upon her in any way.

Her cousin, however, in spite of her constant show of annoyance and indifference, beset her with his attentions at every turn. In seeking to avoid him, she spent much of her time in the cottage with Mr. Blaisdell, or on the beach back of the house with June. She painted diligently, at times, on a picture she had begun in Newbridge.

"The Trysting Place" was the subject; and it represented a handsome woman, in riding habit, leaning against a huge tree by a lonely roadside, one hand catching at the skirt of her dress, and holding it up far enough to display a delicate foot, well booted. In the other hand was a riding-whip with which she appeared to be impatiently striking the grass at her feet. An expression of vexation rested on her face, and a dog crouched on the ground in front of her,—a little black-and-tan,—looking up at her as if questioning the cause of her annoyance. The picture was a study full of delicate meaning.

She intended to take it to Mr. Wells's studio, in the city, when it was finished, and ask him to estimate its value, afterwards to offer it for sale. She was keeping

both plan and picture a secret from her husband, knowing that he would assuredly object to her project. When, at last, it was completed satisfactorily to herself, she wrapped it up carefully, and hid it away, awaiting a favorable opportunity for taking it to the city.

The life of dependence on her husband, who seemed daily to grow more indifferent to her, made her feel as if she were a dead weight, that he desired, but was not able, to release himself from. He rarely accompanied her to any of the many entertainments to which they were constantly being invited while at Long Branch, but was continually insisting that she should go in company with her aunt and cousin without him. He urged her to go, even against her own desire; for he had noticed, long before Mr. Blaisdell had directed his attention to the fact, that the color was leaving her cheek, and a smile was rarely ever to be seen on her countenance, and these traces of declining health and spirits worried him.

"Go out and enjoy the air and society all you can," he had once said to her. "You must not mind my remaining at the side of my friend. If I can help to make his life brighter and happier, it is my duty, in return for what he has done for me."

"But I would rather stay with you," she had answered. "I could be of some assistance too, I am sure."

"No, no; you certainly could not, I assure you. Go with your aunt; you are too much in the house. You need the air, the society, the pleasures of life, to keep you healthful and handsome." And she went without further argument, feeling that he wanted

to be freed of her presence, and thinking that he dreaded a time when she would lose her only remaining charm for him,—her beauty. And plunging into society with vehemence, she sought to find pleasure there; and danced and laughed and chatted, the gayest of the gay, with her many admirers and friends, trying to be happy, without ever succeeding.

Mrs. Bostwick delighted in Irene's companionship because she attracted so much attention. She was the belle of the season. The women all envied her, and the men raved over her beauty. Words of praise and flattery greeted her on all sides, and by listening to them she tried to stifle her heart's longings. But such light words compared with the language of an honest, loving heart are as the chaff to the grain. She would have been made more proud to have heard her husband say, just once, that he still loved her. He never did, however. She put bunches of flowers at his plate each day, which he did not seem to notice. She addressed him with tender words, seeking some caress from him in return; but he would only stare at her in astonishment, as if he did not want to understand, and give no sign of encouragement.

"It is too late," she thought. "He has ceased to care for me." And she grieved over his increasing coldness towards her.

Finally she determined to go to him and make a confession of her love for him in words as a last test. It was one evening after an afternoon of triumph over her cousin. That afternoon she had restrained herself, and listened patiently and calmly to him out on the beach, while he poured out the story of his love and

devotion in her ears, and besought her to leave husband and home and go away with him. She had been much incensed, yet had laughed at him when he had finished, thinking it a surer way to censure him for his weakness, cure him of his passion, and relieve herself in future from his distasteful attentions. She had laughed at him and answered, mockingly,—

"You amuse me; indeed you do. And did you really think I cared for you?"

"You did once," he answered, doggedly.

"Ay, once, perhaps; but that was in the past. And now—now I doubt if I cared even then for you. It was so long ago—one summer—I have outlived it."

"How can you mock me thus?" he had answered her. "You talked differently only a few weeks since. You led me to suppose——"

"What?" she interrupted, with flashing eyes. "The man I once cared for was honorable and respectful! I have no affection for the impertinent coward who has just addressed me! Long since he made himself obnoxious to me, and ought to have discovered it. If you are wise, Robert, you will take a lesson from your past that may be of service to you in future!" she had said, on leaving him. And on that evening, dressing herself as becomingly as possible, in a rich costume of white satin and lace, in readiness for an entertainment to which she had been invited, she went to her husband's room, intending to confess her love for him, hoping thereby to appeal to some latent responsive chord that might still exist in the secret recesses of his heart. Not receiving any answer to her timid rap, she opened the door quietly, and discovered

him sitting alone in the twilight. She was about to rush forward and throw herself at his feet, when he interrupted her purpose by starting up from his chair hastily, and saying,—

"Good heavens, how you startled me, coming in so quietly as you did, and looking like a ghost in that white dress! What can I do for you? Will you sit down, or shall we go below? Is it the white dress or the twilight that makes you look so ghostly? Or are you ill?"

"I cannot say," she answered, her purpose flown as he spoke. "I came to inquire if you were not going to Mrs. Stewart's to-night with me?"

"Is it to-night? I had forgotten all about it! No; I think I will not go. I am too tired. You can go, though, with your aunt and cousin. I will send word for them to call for you," he added.

"Frank, why do you always wish me to go with my cousin? Let me tell you I see too much of him. You are always thrusting me into his company, and I will no longer endure it. I hate him!" Her voice was throbbing with passion, and she stamped her foot on the floor as she spoke.

"Dear me, how should I know that? I thought you were the best of friends, and that you preferred his company to mine." His speech seemed full of biting sarcasm.

"Why should you think so? It is your place to accompany me; and when you cannot make it convenient to do so hereafter, I will remain at home. I am heartily sick of being sent here and there, and jostled about as if I were an unnecessary encumbrance,

something to be gotten rid of in the easiest possible manner. It is your place to escort me, for you are my husband," she said, angrily.

"Ah, do not fear that I shall ever forget that," he replied, quietly. Her anger increased at this rebuff, and she scarcely realized what she was saying as she went on,—

"Frank Raynor, for four years we have been living a lie. Once you said you loved me; I do not need cold words to tell me now that another feeling has crowded that passion out of your heart. Our lives are both made wretched, because we have no happiness in each other's society. Let us separate and seek it apart in the world. I am sick, heartily sick, of the way we are living. I am not able to endure it any longer! Four years already, think of it, and a future without hope of change. What if the world does talk?—let it, its gossip will be preferable."

"Irene," said Frank, coming towards her and laying his hand on her shoulder, "you are excited, and don't know what you are saying. Go to your room; I will make myself ready and will accompany you to Mrs. Stewart's to-night."

"But I will not go now,—that is, I prefer to remain at home——"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes; quite sure."

"Well, then, it shall be as you say."

She was ashamed of her unwomanly display of temper, but as there seemed nothing more to be said she left him. "Too late,—too late. It is useless to attempt to awaken life in the dead; but I will continue no

longer dependent on him, since I may not possess his love. There must be some escape, and I will discover it," she said to herself.

Frank had been puzzled at first by Irene's manner that evening, and finally interpreted it as the bursting of a long-gathering storm. At Newbridge she had seemed happy and contented, but he had noticed a change in her manner ever since they had come hither, and she had met with Count Beaurynski again. He never understood the little advances she attempted; he thought she offered them as a sort of sacrifice, wherewith to appease her conscience for allowing another man's image to fill her heart, never once dreaming that she cared for him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In the morning Irene found a note under her door from her husband saying that he would not wait to breakfast with her, being obliged to leave on an early train for the city. Immediately on reading it she determined to take her picture to Mr. Wells, for after she knew its worth and had talked with him she could better be able to plan her future course. So, as soon as breakfast was over, she ordered the carriage to be brought to the door to convey her to the boat.

"I am going into the city to do some shopping today; can I do anything for you?" she inquired of Miss Blaisdell, as she left the breakfast-room.

"Nothing, thank you," was the reply.

When she arrived at the pier, she found a crowd of people waiting to go on board the boat, which could be seen in the distance, making its way towards them; and carefully shielding her picture, which made a large, awkward, though light, package for her to carry, she made her way to the extreme edge of the pier, and stood there looking out over the water. When the boat had landed her passengers, and was ready to receive a new load, the people rushed forward with such force as to take her almost off her feet, making her utterly powerless to protect her picture, which was in danger of being torn from its light frame.

"Permit me to help you, madame," said a respectful voice at her side. She had not time to answer, or to see to whom she owed this offer of assistance, before a strong hand lifted the package out of her hand and held it aloft in the air, and the owner of the hand pressed close behind her until they were on board. Turning to discover to whom she owed this timely aid, she was not a little startled as she recognized Count Beaurynski.

The color came and went in her cheeks; but it was no time now to demur, so she silently allowed him to escort her to a seat, when, as he rested the picture against the railing near her, she said to him,—

"You have been of great service to me, Count, and I thank you."

"I am happy to have been able to serve you, madame," he answered, politely, as he lingered. She was silent; and he finally continued, "May I intrude myself a very few minutes, and sit here near you?"

She hesitated a moment before answering him; then, feeling that it would scarcely be right to offer objection to his society, having accepted a kindness from him, she told him he might.

He had had no intention of going to the city before seeing Irene that morning, but had only walked down to the pier to watch the boat land its passengers; yet, when he caught sight of her, alone and at a disadvantage, he made up his mind to serve her if she would allow him, and to seek on board the boat, as it sped on its way to the city, an opportunity he had long desired yet never found for reinstating himself in her favor if possible. Scarcely knowing how to broach the delicate subject, he began by saying,—

"This is the first time that I have visited America since four years ago this summer."

"Four years! Is it so long as that?" she replied.

"Yes; and a long time—a very long time—it seems to one who carries a weight in his heart all the while," he answered, in a low voice.

Irene turned her face from him, and looked over the sea. A moment's silence ensued before he continued,—

"I cannot fail to see, madame, how my presence offends you; and I desire only to remain long enough to say a few words to you in palliation of a past offence, if you will be generous enough to listen to them."

She gave no other sign of hearing him than to make a slight, impatient move of her hand; and he continued,—

"I am the last male descendant of a family in Russia, who have for many centuries been active in

its politics and the management of its affairs; and, throughout the whole line of my ancestry, no family in Russia has borne a higher reputation for honor, in both public and private life, than has been conceded to my forefathers on account of their merit. It was left to me—the last representative of the name—to cast the first blot. I do not know what evil genius directed my course when I succumbed to my baser nature, in a moment of unmanly weakness, and abused the innocence and modesty of one I cared more for than I am now at liberty to say. Perhaps, had I not esteemed her so highly, I could have forgotten in time that I had so demeaned myself; but I am not able to forget; and there will be no peace of mind for me until I have confessed my repentance and besought forgiveness from her whom I thus wounded. I came to America with a view of seeking her——"

Irene interrupted him,—

"I must not listen to what you are saying. I cannot fail to understand you, and am wronging myself and my husband by permitting you to continue. I beg of you to leave me to myself," she said, earnestly.

"Madame, I entreat you to hear me to the end, in justice to yourself and me. Let me assure you you will do no wrong to any one in listening." He paused a moment before continuing. "I came back here, and found the one whom I sought sooner than I had hoped. She was an honored wife, and avoided me as a burnt child shuns the fire, so that I could never approach her without adding to my former offence; and I hope to be forgiven for having taken advantage of the first opportunity that has presented itself in an endeavor to con-

fess my sorrow and the remorse I have suffered, and seek forgiveness for the wrong I committed in the past."

"Count Beaurynski," Irene replied, turning her beautiful eyes on him, "I regret that you have recalled the past; yet, since your purpose is a commendable one and you have suffered so keenly, it would be uncharitable in me not to grant forgiveness; and as I believe your penitence is sincere, I do most freely forgive you." She extended her hand as she finished speaking. He took it, and held it a moment respectfully in his own; then, thanking her, arose, lifted his hat, and walked away.

Left to herself, Irene became absorbed in thinking over what the Count had been saying to her. She felt more kindly towards him now than ever before. Her aunt had told her more than once, in seeking to restore him to her favor again, that the best men sometimes made such mistakes, led on by passion and the force of circumstances; perhaps it had been so with him, for she had been unwise and at fault in seeing him alone that day. In thinking of this she came to realize her position now on the boat. It had not occurred to her before that it was hardly the proper thing for a woman in her position to go to and from the city alone, until she noticed that the people stared at her curiously, and also that the women on board were in pairs or had gentlemen for escorts. She wished that she had brought June with her, only June would have told Frank all about the picture, and she did not want him to know; and her aunt never could keep anything to herself, but was forever chattering, and the whole world always knew what she knew, so she had

not even invited her to accompany her. Now she wondered if Count Beaurynski did not think it strange of her to come away alone, with such an ungainly package to carry. She became much worried, and felt grateful to him when he came towards her as the boat reached New York and offered to assist her again through the crowd.

He escorted her to a carriage, and conveyed to the driver from her lips the number of Mr. Wells's studio, as the place of her destination, then as she noticed ever so light a shade of surprise overspread his countenance, she realized that she was about to commit another indiscretion by visiting an artist's private studio without a chaperon; she thought of calling out to the driver to change his course, but afterwards reconsidered, for since she had come to the city on this secret mission, and her future plans were to be formed on the issue, the picture must be delivered by her; so she went bravely to the end of her journey. She found the artist busily at work in his studio. He arose as she entered with a look of affright on her pretty face.

"Why, Mrs. Raynor, this is an agreeable surprise," he said, taking the package from her hands and offering her a chair.

She dropped into it with an air of complete exhaustion, but recovering immediately, said, pointing to the package,—

"There is a picture I have finished and brought to you to have your opinion upon."

He undid the parcel, and she watched his face all the while. With a pleased expression he placed the

picture on an easel and stood back to get a good view of it.

"Admirable! Did you really do this yourself?" he said, finally.

"Yes; do you think it good?"

"Good? It is excellent. I could not make any improvement on it! Ah, Mrs. Raynor, you have a remarkable eye for expression, and a skilful touch. If you would devote proper time and study to art, you could make a great name for yourself."

"Do you really think so?" she inquired, eagerly, arising and going towards him.

"Yes," he answered, unconsciously; "and in Paris, if you would only go to Paris, and then make these fancy studies that your taste inclines towards from life there, you would find a keener appreciation and receive a better price for them. They care more for art on the other side. They buy more pictures and pay better prices for good work there than in this country, and they offer a certain homage to the skilful painter who succeeds in pleasing their fancy that lifts him quite above the pale of common mortals. Here in America, —in my own country,—the gauge is not so much 'how excellent is his work' as 'how much does it pay him' that regulates the open sesame to the hearts and homes of society. I am an American, yet I would rather share my dog's cot in Paris and be appreciated than to live in luxury here, where they cannot value properly what I have done. Pardon me, Mrs. Raynor, perhaps I am too severe,—but I have taken the medal three seasons at the *Salon* in Paris, and I recently placed one of my pictures here in the Academy, along

with other American artists, a beautiful subject, 'A Castle on the Rhine by Moonlight.' But a new man, lately sprung into publicity from a millionaire's family, who does good work, I will agree, but no competitor of mine, was given first place, and all the glory, on account of a few dogs and horses in a barnyard, fairly well painted. I am going to Europe next week, and I intend to remain there." He wiped the perspiration from his brow, for it was very warm, and he had grown excited as he talked.

"Going away to remain, and so soon!" said Irene, regretfully. "Oh, I am grieved to hear that, for I have counted on your help by the way of criticism, in the future, intending henceforth to devote all of my time to painting."

"Yes, I have my passage already engaged, and shall leave next week. I want to enter the picture I am now working on in the *Salon*. Indeed, were it not that I had need of my time to finish it I should have been at Long Branch through these hot days. Now, if you were unmarried, and so had nothing to think of but yourself and your art, you could join a company of art students who are going over in the same steamer with me, intending to make a tour of Germany, Switzerland, Tyrol, Italy, and France, with a view of studying life and scenery in each country. It would be a grand opportunity for you!"

"Mr. Wells, are you laughing at me? Do you flatter me, or are you sincere in your estimation of my capabilities?"

"Why should I laugh at you, and lead your fancy at random over a field trodden already by so many

unworthy of the slightest recognition because of the very crudeness of their efforts, if I did not feel that there was a great future to be attained by you. No, I am sincere! But your home, husband, and society have so many prior claims on your time that your work will be neglected, and your progress impeded."

"What price may I ask for this picture?" she inquired of him so soon as he had finished speaking.

"This? Why—it will sell perhaps for twelve hundred dollars——"

"Is it worth so much as that?" she exclaimed, in excitement.

"No, candidly, it is not worth so much; but you have a reputation as a society beauty and belle, and it will sell readily for that price on that account. Do you intend to sell it?"

"Yes; but I do not wish it known that I have painted it. Mr. Raynor does not know of it; he has not seen it even; he would certainly be displeased!"

"Well, at any rate, I would put that price on it. It is better to ask too high rather than too low a price, always. The public will the sooner notice it. A poor man will not buy, and a rich man is attracted first by the price, in America. The greater the price the greater the merit, in his eye. There must be merit too, but let a good price be put upon it. He loves better to point out a fine painting on the walls of his home to his friends and say, 'I paid twenty thousand dollars for that!' rather than 'it is by Meissonier.' So I would put that price upon it, if I were you."

"Will you also advise me as to the best means of disposing of it?" Irene inquired, her breast heaving

with the new excitement his words had thrown her into.

"Certainly; leave it with me; I will take it to an art-store, where I have friends, and have it so placed as to attract attention. But what name will you use? Every picture must be known to be the work of some hand, if it be 'Smith' or 'Jones.'"

"I have thought of that, and will say 'Norma' is the artist. It is the name of the heroine of a novel from which I first read the incident that led me to paint the picture."

"Very well, let it be 'Norma';" and he took up a small brush as he spoke, dipped it in some brown paint on his palette, and painted the name in one corner of the picture; then picking up a card from the table near by he handed it to her, saying,—

"And here, 'Norma,'—pardon me, but we artists must call each other by our professional names," he said, laughing,—"here is the card of the friend with whom I will place your picture. I will ask him to inform you as soon as it is sold. Of course, I shall have to tell him your true name on that account, but he will never expose it."

Her mission being ended, Irene, thanking him, arose to go. At the door-way she paused, and said,—

"What will be your address in Paris? perhaps I may go there this season." He wrote his name and address on a card and gave it to her, saying,—

"So you expect to go abroad, do you? The season is advancing; it would be pleasant if you were going on the same steamer with my friends and myself."

"Perhaps I may, one time is as favorable as another for me; but if I do, I will let you know beforehand."

"By the way," he added, "you are acquainted with two of our party, I believe,—Mrs. Frothingham and her niece,—they have spoken of you to me at least."

"Yes; I am slightly acquainted with them. Are they to be of the party? I met them at Long Branch this summer. My aunt had their cottage that season when you first gave me instructions."

"Ah, yes, to be sure! Well, they will be of the number. Miss Celia paints from nature. They spend much of their time abroad, and are most interesting travelling companions."

"How fortunate for me that they are going. I will see at once if I can arrange for the journey in time. Good-morning." She closed the door and hurried away.

"Whew!" said the artist to himself, as he stood with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets before the picture she had brought; "the woman has talent,—and spirit, too, and there is trouble brewing somewhere in the air or I am no interpreter of human nature." And he viewed the picture in different lights, yet always with the same expression of satisfaction.

Count Beaurynski, being overpowered by the desire to be near Irene, as well as curiosity to see the picture which she was taking to Mr. Wells,—for he was certain that it was a picture,—directed his course whither she had gone, and waited in an apothecary's shop opposite the studio until he saw her depart, when, immediately crossing over, he tapped at the artist's door. Mr. Wells was glad to welcome him, for they were acquaint-

ances of long standing, and they found many things to talk over of interest to both. The Count's eyes roamed around the room, finally resting on Irene's picture.

"Some of your work?" he inquired, carelessly, pointing towards it, when the artist had finished telling him of his prospective trip abroad.

"No," Mr. Wells replied, and related to him confidentially how it came there and whose handiwork it was, not because it was his custom to betray confidence, but because he knew that the Count could be trusted with the secret, and thought there was no harm in telling so long as her husband would not know of it. He was amazed, however, when his friend, after inquiring the price, pulled out a check-book and wrote out an order for twelve hundred dollars and handed it to him, saying,—

"The picture is mine. Get the check cashed, it is made out to your order, and return payment for it; but, as you are my friend, let Mrs. Raynor not learn that the picture was purchased by me. And now I must be off. What steamer did you say that you are to sail on? I will go along with you if I am able to secure a state-room on the same boat."

"It is very odd how things do happen sometimes," said Mr. Wells to himself, as he paced the floor after the Count had gone. "It is very odd!"

CHAPTER XXV.

IRENE after leaving Mr. Wells went about to attend to some shopping, which she wished to have seem as her excuse for coming to the city; and as it occupied a longer time than she had anticipated, it was late in the afternoon when she returned to the pier. She was annoyed to find the Count Beaurynski again one of the passengers on the returning boat, but he never came near her, and simply bowed in recognition in passing where she sat.

When they arrived at Long Branch, and she was making her way through the crowd to the landing, she caught sight of her husband looking anxiously over the passengers as they came off the boat. As his glance rested on her face the look vanished for a moment and instantly gave place to another that seemed quite threatening as he looked behind her.

"He is angry because I am alone," she thought. But it was not that. He had seen the Count Beaurynski close at her back.

All the time he had been in the city that day he had been troubled on account of the interview of the night before, and had hastened home earlier than usual, having a dread of what Irene might do in his absence in this new and strange freak of her temperament. Upon hearing that she had gone into the city by boat, and alone, he was more worried, and went immediately down to the pier to watch for her return.

"If she should never come back!" he said to himself, with terror in his heart, as he watched the boat making its way towards the landing. But she did come, and the Count Beaurynski on the same boat with her.

"Irene, why did not you ask your aunt or sister to accompany you to the city,—or me even? I would have waited for you had I known that you contemplated going."

"I preferred going alone. June would have been a care, and Aunt Mollie wearies me with her endless chatter; and you—you had gone before I was up."

"Count Beaurynski was a passenger on the incoming boat. Did he go down with you this morning?" he inquired.

"He went in the same boat, yes!" she answered, thinking that he was annoyed that the Count should see her without an escort. Nothing further was said by either until they reached home. There Irene found a telegram awaiting her from Mr. Wells, reading simply, "The picture is sold. Have sent money by mail." Her excitement was scarcely controllable.

"I am going to Europe," she startled her husband by saying that same evening after dinner, as they were seated alone on the veranda.

"To Europe?" he repeated, starting forward from his chair and turning to look in her face.

"Yes. I am weary of life here, and want to get away from it out into another world!"

"But I cannot leave now to accompany you," he answered, as calmly as he could.

"There is no need of your going."

"You would not go alone,—without me, I mean?"

"Why not? You do not need me here. My company is no comfort to you. I told you last night that I was sick of this mockery. I want to go away where I need only smile because I am happy, and not keep up a hollow sham over an aching heart for the world's sake any longer."

Only smile because she was happy away from him was all he heard or heeded.

"Irene, Irene, what are you saying?" he gasped, in a voice full of trouble.

"I am saying what I mean,—that I have lived for the world long enough. Henceforth I am going to live for myself. I shall, doubtless, leave next Saturday with Mrs. Frothingham, her niece, and a company of young people for a tour of the Provinces, with a view of pursuing my art studies with them."

"You have your plans already laid out?"

"No; only thought out. I have come to consult first with you. I wished first to gain your consent."

"And if I will not give it?"

"But you will. Oh, Frank, how long do you think this life will endure? It is pitiful to think how we are both sacrificing the best years of our lives," she answered him, entreatingly.

"What do you wish to do the rest of your life?"

"Paint," she answered, quickly, as if the word had been hanging on her lips for months. "Mr. Wells says fame, riches, and honor await me if I pursue the practice of my art diligently."

"He has told you this?" he inquired, as he looked

on her beaming countenance, and thought, "She cares more for them than for me."

"Yes; besides, I am sure of it. See how quickly my first picture sold. Some one else evidently——"

"I bought that picture," he interrupted her by saying.

"You?" she turned her face towards him in amazement.

"Yes, I bought it. I did not want my wife's handiwork or June's face to hang in a saloon, a gambling den, or a house of ill-repute, as it was just as likely to hang as in more reputable places, any one being at liberty to purchase it."

Instead of being touched by this mark of his consideration, Irene's soul raged within her, at the knowledge so long withheld from her.

"Where is it now?" she asked, authoritatively.

"I sent it to my mother in Boston."

She was too angry, too unsettled to continue the conversation, so without another word arose and went indoors. Late that evening, in looking out of the window of her room, at the back of the house facing the sea, she could plainly discern, by the light of the full moon, her husband pacing up and down there alone on the beach. She retired to her bed, and long after, how long was not aware, she aroused herself from a half waking, half sleeping state and went again to the window; he was still there, still pacing up and down as before. She knew he was sorely troubled, and unconsciously kept vigil with him in the seclusion of her room. Three times she arose and looked out on the beach, seeing him still there. The

fourth time, as the first traces of another day were breaking over the water, she looked forth and he was gone.

"How his pride will suffer when I leave him," she said, half aloud, as she lay down at length to seek the rest she was so much in need of.

It was late the next morning when she awakened. Her husband had already breakfasted with June and left for the city. She found beside her plate a letter from Mr. Wells, containing the money for her picture, and upon reading the letter her resolution to go abroad strengthened and her enthusiasm increased. "An old friend of mine," he had written, "a great art patron—not an American—chanced in my studio soon after you left and was so charmed by your picture that he purchased it at once."

"The picture sold on its merits alone this time, for Frank had no knowledge of its existence, and the name of the artist is not known," she said, and determined to lose no time in making preparations for her departure.

She first wrote a letter to her father asking his consent to June's accompanying her on the trip; then tore it in pieces so soon as it was written, remembering that he would not receive it in time to answer, and sent a telegram to him instead. Afterwards she went out to call on her aunt, and when she had confided to her her new project, Mrs. Bostwick said, as if there was nothing unusual in this sudden plan of her niece,—

"How delightful it will be for you to go travelling all over those beautiful foreign countries, in such pleasant company! I would certainly go with you, my

dear, only you know my marriage takes place this fall. It is too bad that you will not be here then, for of course the journey will take a long time and you could not return in season. And is Frank not going to accompany you? Dear me, what will he do all the while? No doubt you are sorry to leave him so long; but then the benefit to your art studies and the pleasure of the journey will outweigh the regret! June will take up his time, too. I never saw a man so satisfied with a child's society as he is with hers. You intend taking June with you too? Dear me, how very foolish! What will you do with her? She will be such an extra care and expense too, and what will Frank do without her? You will like Paris, my dear, and Paris will like you. Try to be there when the season begins; you will be sure to create a sensation in society, under Mrs. Frothingham's chaperonage. She has a magnificent home in Paris and has the *entrée* into the first circles there; you could not be better introduced. She has no end of money, too, and possesses magnificent diamonds. What a pity that you have not diamonds to wear, they would add such brilliancy to your beauty! And you want me to call on Mrs. Frothingham with you? Why, she is not here any longer; her cottage is closed for the season. She has gone to New York to prepare for this same journey, no doubt. I will go up to the city with you to-day, though, and call on her there if you wish."

"Thank you, I wish you would."

"Dear me! you will have a great deal to think of, so little time, and so many calls to be made, too! But do not take June with you; leave her with me while

you are away; I will see that she is started to school, and will enjoy having her company. You had better leave her with me until you return."

"I will see," was Irene's only answer.

They went at once by cars into the city. They called on Mrs. Frothingham, who was pleased to learn that Irene would accompany them abroad, and sent to secure a state-room for her near her own.

"I am going abroad next Saturday," said Irene to Mr. Blaisdell that same afternoon, after her return from the city.

"What!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes," she continued; "I am going abroad with a party of friends. Frank cannot leave just now."

"But what will he do without you?"

"Do? The same as he does now, I suppose," she answered, thoughtlessly, then added, hastily,—

"He finds his time so much taken up with his business and you that he will not miss me much."

"Do I take so much of his time? I did not mean to, I am sure," the old man said, with regret in his tone.

"Not too much. He enjoys your society better than mine, I think," she said, leaving him, not caring to say more on the subject by way of explanation. When her husband came home, she met him at the gate, saying,—

"I have told Mr. Blaisdell and my aunt, who will tell the world, that I shall sail for Europe next Saturday with a party of friends, and I have telegraphed to father asking his consent to June's accompanying me."

He staggered a little, and turned pale.

"Irene, are you mad?" he said, sternly.

"No, only just recovering my senses; awakening after a long season of stupidity."

"But I will not consent."

"You had better give your consent and avoid unpleasantness, for I shall certainly go, just the same, with or without it; my mind is made up."

He had stopped when she first addressed him at the gateway; now he proceeded on his way to the house, and she walked along by his side without saying another word. As he reached the veranda he turned suddenly towards her, saying,—

"There is another reason why you cannot go. I have not the means, and cannot afford it."

"You need not afford it; I mean to provide for myself."

He looked inquiringly at her.

"Not what you have supplied from time to time, but what I have earned. I painted another picture since that first one, which I have sold for six times what that brought."

"Who bought it?" he inquired, his hurried breathing almost choking his speech.

"I do not know. A stranger. It was sold for me in the city."

"All this has taken place without my knowledge?"

"Why should I seek to intrude my art upon your notice when you have never displayed the slightest interest in it by expression or action?" she answered, haughtily.

"What was the picture?" he inquired, assuming a calmness that he did not feel.

"The subject,—a woman waiting by a roadside for

her lover who does not come. I have named it 'The Trysting Place.'"

He went into the house and up to his room without another word. She was much perplexed by his demeanor, but he came to her door finally and said,—

"Irene, go abroad, since you are so determined; not with my approval, remember, only I will not oppose your course; but leave June here with me."

"What will the world say?"

"The world? You do not care what it says; you have said so already."

"Let us first see what father says," she answered, and he went away.

Why dwell at length on all that ensued between that day and the day of Irene's departure; why rehearse again and again the heart-pangs, the regret, the sorrow, the silent contest between love and pride, the doubts fed by suspicion, the trivial actions and incidents interpreted for such service, the sleepless nights, the many heartaches that were experienced by both Irene and Frank during the interval. They are felt in like degree in many hearts and homes, and buried there while the world is none the wiser.

The great vessel stood at the dock to receive its precious burden of humanity. The deck was crowded with the people who were going away and those who had come to say farewell. Among them Mrs. Bostwick, June, and Frank, who had come to see Irene off on her long journey.

June was not going with her. A sad little letter had come to Irene in response to her telegram to her father, begging her not to go across the water lest something

should happen to her and he might never see her again, and entreating her, if she was determined to go and nothing could change her, to leave June behind. "I want my girls near me," he wrote. "I have no one left to me now but them. Do not put the great ocean between us. I want both of you where I can see you sometimes; but, if you must go, leave June behind and let her return to me, I want her where I can see her." The writing was crooked and blurred, betraying an unsteady hand, and the paper was blistered where the tears had fallen as he wrote. Irene dropped more tears on its pages; and, folding it carefully, placed it among her treasures, writing a tender farewell in reply, and promising that June should return to him as soon as she had sailed. She sent him the number of Mr. Wells's studio in Paris, and told him to write to her there always, and his letters would be forwarded to her wherever she might be.

While Mrs. Bostwick was engaged with other friends who were sailing on the same steamer, Irene besought Frank and June to go below with her to her state-room and there spend the few moments that would elapse before the boat was to start. There, with the weakness and irresolution that comes often at parting, she caught both of her husband's hands in her own, and with tears flooding her eyes said, plaintively,—

"Oh, Frank, it seems terrible, now, to part as we are doing. Promise me that you will forgive and forget all the cruel things I have said of late. I have tried so hard to do what was right and my duty towards you, and have failed utterly and hopelessly, and now my heart is sorely troubled at parting from you." She

entwined her arms about his neck and clung there, hysterically sobbing all the while.

"Oh, I have been wretched and have made you and every one about me wretched all my life, but now, now it seems to me as if I cannot go." June, overcome by Irene's emotion, was sobbing in sympathy in a corner of the room. Irene, drawing her towards her, and putting an arm about her, said,—

"Come here, June; be good and kind to papa, and write to me about yourself and him every week,—won't you, dear? and I will send you both something nice from across the ocean."

Then they wept in each other's arms, until startled by the bells warning all on board who were not passengers to go on land.

"So soon?" said Frank, starting up in surprise. "And I must leave you, Irene. Oh, my loved one, I hope you may find happiness and enjoyment in your trip abroad. I had so many things I wanted to say to you at the last moment before you should go, but they are all swept out of my memory now save one,—that is, that you must think of me as kindly as you can; and when you come back" (the last bell sounded)—"when you come back perhaps all will be different. I pray heaven that it may." He pressed kisses hurriedly on her eyes, her cheeks, and lips, and slipped a purse into her hand. "God bless and watch over you," he added, and, taking June by the hand, hurried away. Irene followed them to the ship's deck so soon as she recovered herself, and, leaning over the railing at the side, she sought for a last glimpse of her husband's face in the crowd on the wharf, but could see no one she knew

save her aunt standing there waving her handkerchief and nodding and smiling adieu as the ship moved out to sea. She could not see her husband, but he had seen her; and he saw near her, leaning against the deck's railing with indolent ease and grace in the midst of all the excitement of waving hats, hands, and handkerchiefs about him, the form of the Count Beaurynski.

"My God!" he exclaimed between his set teeth. "Is it possible that he, too, is a passenger?" And he went to the ship's office to assure himself. Yes; there was his name on the list, and right beneath it the name of his wife. Those two together, and the names of strangers above and below them. Had it chanced that way, or was it all a scheme, a plan? Had he been deceived and made but a miserable dupe all along?

Resigning June to her aunt's charge, he went uptown by himself, studiously recalling everything that had transpired since they had first met the Count Beaurynski. He went over every look, every action of Irene's that could in any way strengthen his belief that she was in league with the Count, and had been planning all along to take passage on the same steamer with him. He recalled her agitation at the first meeting, and the day he had met her when she had returned from New York on the same boat with Count Beaurynski. What her mission had been that day to the city he had not thought to inquire. Now he remembered that on that day she had first given utterance to her determination to go abroad. Each word, smile, look of hers during the past weeks that could serve as confirmation to this late distrust he pondered over until his agony of mind was terrible. For days he shunned

the society of every one, seeking solitude with his thoughts. He weighed every word she had spoken to him at parting. He tried in vain to make excuses for her. Everything seemed to point one way. She had succumbed to the dictates of her heart, and had left him to keep near Count Beaurynski.

He would not permit himself to doubt that she was faithful to him. He believed only that she was happier near the one she loved, and had seized this opportunity of travelling with friends in pursuit of art studies as an excuse for continuing in his society.

What did she intend and hope for the future, he wondered. God and herself alone knew! How she had clung on his neck, too, and kissed him at parting, with such apparent regret at leaving him! Judas kissed Christ when he betrayed him, and sudden remorse might have dictated her parting words. He made himself insane almost with such silent reasonings; and finally said,—

"There is but one avenue of escape for her, and I will furnish it,—divorce! It will cost a great sacrifice of pride and hope, but may save her honor and secure her happiness."

CHAPTER XXVI.

By chance and not intent the Count was a passenger on the same steamer with Irene, his first knowledge that she had ever so slight an intention of crossing the ocean having come to him when, in turning his glance from the fast-receding shores of America over the passengers on deck, it rested on her tear-stained face and saw her eyes gazing across the blue waste of the ocean towards where the forms on land were no longer distinguishable with such an expression of longing and regret as was painful for him to behold.

He had registered his name as a passenger that same afternoon on which Irene had visited the artist, and she had been the next to enroll after him.

Irene was very sad and low-spirited for the first day or two on board; finally comforting herself, however, by recalling her husband's last words, "Think kindly of me, and when you come back all may be different." Think kindly of him; indeed, she would never be able to think otherwise, and she comforted herself with reasoning that perhaps this very separation for a time was all that was needed to bring their hearts together; and, going out on deck with others, her laugh was soon heard as merry as any.

She met Count Beaurynski frequently, and, while never seeking his company, had stopped several times and talked with him pleasantly. What is the virtue of forgiving if one must ever harbor in remembrance

the fault forgiven? she argued, and treated him kindly at all times.

There were eight in the party of tourists, including Mrs. Frothingham, her niece, and Irene. Mr. Wells was not counted in their number, as he left them at London, going direct to Paris. They bade adieu to both him and the Count at the former place and pursued their course without them, intending to visit Paris on their return.

Many days after the landing of the little company on foreign soil,—very many more it seemed to Irene than it really numbered,—they found themselves in Switzerland, about leaving St. Martin on their way to the beautiful Valley of Chamouni. They had visited so many places and travelled over so much strange soil, it was little wonder that both time and distance seemed greater than they really were.

At each halting-place she inquired eagerly for letters, Mr. Wells having volunteered to forward to the company according to their prescribed route, but no word had she received from her husband. She had written to him from London telling of her safe arrival, and to her father on the journey hither. At Geneva she had found a short letter from June, mailed from Newbridge, telling her that she intended to remain with her father all the time now, as he had been so lonely and unhappy without her.

"It is better so," said Irene to herself, as she read over the half-finished sentences and the childish phrases with which the letter abounded, all the while wondering why no letter had yet come from her husband. In company with Celia Frothingham, between whom

and herself a warm friendship had sprung up, she lingered one afternoon on the bridge that crosses the Arve near St. Martin, gazing with admiration at the distant yet magnificent view of Mont Blanc that could be had from there, when a group of Swiss peasant girls approached near where they stood.

"Look, Celia," said Irene, hastily, plucking at her friend's sleeve that she might the more quickly turn from her silent admiration of the surrounding landscape, "have you ever seen a more beautiful face than that of yonder Swiss peasant girl,—the little one I mean, with the brown hair and laughing eyes?"

"Yes; I see a more beautiful face each time I look into yours, my dear. What can you find in these common peasant girls to attract you? I have watched you when you were not aware gazing after them as if a prince or queen and retinue were passing by. As for me, I would rather direct my attention towards the handiwork of God, as shown in the natural scenery of this beautiful country, than to waste it on the common peasantry that people it."

"Ah, Celia, you do not see with my eyes. Now, in this laughing, innocent young girl, possessing such a perfect form, beautiful face, and merry disposition, with such quiet, modest, unpretentious manner,—the same that characterizes all the Swiss peasantry,—I see one who might without effort attract the admiration of a queen or prince, yet possessing that enhancing charm of beauty most attractive because of its rarity,—unconsciousness of it. Lend me your pencil for a moment, please, that I may jot down a description of her picturesque costume for future reference; her face I shall

carry in my memory for one long while. When I go back I will convey it to canvas in a picture I now have in my mind's eye, which I will probably name 'Contentment.'"

"When I go back." How many times she had spoken that phrase during their journey. The farther away she got from her native land the more frequently the words fell from her lips. Once she had believed, down there in the cottage at Long Branch, that if she went away she would never return; but when the steamer had sailed from port she had thought that some time she might; and, lingering on the remembrance of the parting with her husband all the while since she had set foot on foreign soil, she had said, "I will surely return to him, if only to discover whether my absence has awakened any slumbering remains of former affection, that may still survive in his breast for me, which may so endear my memory to him that he will long for my presence, and receive me with wide-open arms. Some say love sleeps and does not awaken ofttimes until its object is taken from it." So she built her hopes, like air-castles high in air, to be overthrown and destroyed at the first breath of disappointment.

She was jotting down in her note-book some details of the peasant's dress when the guide approached with letters for Celia and herself, saying, as he handed them to the ladies,—

"We are to leave in an hour."

"Thank you," answered Irene, taking the letter he handed her; and glancing at the envelope, completely covered with many changes in the addresses, showing

that it had followed her about some time on their journey, she recognized her husband's handwriting in its first address. Her eyes sparkled and her hands trembled as she opened it, in her eagerness to peruse its contents.

"My letter, I see, is from a dear, quaint old friend in Paris. I must tell you all about him sometime, and take you to visit him when we are there. And yours? Well, there is no need of asking who has written yours. The color in your cheeks and the light in your eyes say plainer than words it is from the absent husband," said Celia, in sportive vein.

"Yes, you are right," said Irene; "and, if you will be so kind as to excuse me, I have a fancy I should like to read it alone down on the banks of the river."

"Excuse you? of course I will; and, indeed, I was about to suggest that I had better take this letter of mine, which is sure to be full of cutting sarcasm, light, bantering raillery and wit like former letters from the same pen, out of the sacred society of such an earnest, loving, longing-for-your-return epistle as that one of yours is certain to be; so go your way in peace," Celia answered her, merrily. And Irene went down on the bank of the river, and sat where she could look up at her friend's laughing face above her, and read the letter, not once, but twice and thrice, all the color leaving her cheeks. Silently tearing it into fragments, at length, she dropped the pieces into the swift-flowing current of the Arve, where they soon drifted away out of her sight. The words it contained were burned in her memory: "Remain where you are; I no longer desire or expect you to return to me. Our marriage was a

great mistake; another, and perhaps greater one, was attempting to keep up the semblance of a happiness that did not exist. So soon as law permits, you shall be free to follow your inclinations; until that time, be patient, do not forget that you are my wife and bear my name. May Heaven guard and protect you from all harm, and bring you the comfort and solace your soul longs for."

That was what had been written on the pages of the letter she had been watching for so anxiously for days past. The words had stared at her like death's eyes, peering into the hidden recesses of her heart and seeking out each new-born hope and hopeful thought that might be grasped and destroyed.

"Irene, Irene, what is the matter?" said Celia, coming down by her side and laying her hand on her shoulder. "Did you not hear me calling you from the bridge? They will be waiting for us at the inn, and aunt will be annoyed at the delay. Good heavens! what is the matter with you?" she inquired, as Irene turned her face towards her, without a word, the expression so full of misery, being pitiful to behold.

"He does not want me to come back," she answered, scarcely conscious of what she was saying.

"Who? Your husband? Of course not. Why should he? You have only just begun the journey, and there is ever so much to be seen yet,—so many places to visit! Did you expect he would rave and cry, and beseech of you to return at once, bemoaning his loneliness in the first letter that he would write?" said Celia, in a vain endeavor to offer some kind of solace for an imaginary grief.

"No, no; it is not that. He wants me never to return!" answered Irene, hoping to have her friend offer some excuse for even that request.

"What are you saying? It cannot be that you have read aright. Let me read for you. Where is the letter?" Celia questioned, eagerly, strangely troubled by the increasing pallor of Irene's countenance. Irene did not answer with words, but pointed silently to where the swift waters of the Arve flowed away under the bridge; then, losing all consciousness, she fell back on the shore.

"She was overcome by the fatigue of walking," explained Celia to the guide, who came up just at this juncture to learn what occasioned their delay; and they sprinkled water in her face and brought her back to herself again, waiting awhile afterwards until she should feel strong enough to walk back to the inn, supported by an arm of each.

"She fainted from over-fatigue," explained Celia to her aunt, who met them on the way, having become much disturbed by the guide's absence. Irene repaid the kindly consideration by a look of thankfulness, and they proceeded on their way to Chamouni.

They were in Venice, when Irene turned from the window of her room in the hotel, where she had stood looking despondently out on the wet street, into which a dismal rain was yet steadily falling, to answer a rap at her door. When she opened it a letter was thrust into her hand bearing an American post-mark and the stamp of Newbridge, yet directed in an unknown handwriting. Hastily tearing it open, she learned its contents. It had been written by a lawyer there,

representing himself as counsel for her husband in a suit which he had brought before the court for divorce from her on the grounds of desertion. Had she any defence to offer? In such event, her reply was necessitated within a stated time.

"Divorce! Desertion!" She repeated the words mechanically, continuing, after a moment's thought, "As well that excuse as any other, I suppose." An impulse burned within her for an instant to stop the procedure by returning to her native country and proclaiming that it was false; that she had never thought of deserting her husband. But it died out instantly, in the remembrance that such an act would not recover for her lost love, but cause more sorrow instead. She tried to calm herself with reasoning that it was better that they should be legally separated from each other than continue to live together, yet apart, as they had. But she was pained at the knowledge that the publicity of the separation should have its beginning in Newbridge.

Frank Raynor had weighed the matter carefully beforehand, and with good counsel, deciding that, all things considered, there would be less of public comment if the case was tried at Newbridge, where the people there would hear the truth of the matter, and not revel in doubtful and exaggerated accounts of it from another city. Besides, the requirements of the law governing the granting of divorces were less exacting in that Western State than in the East, and they could be procured with lighter cause and less publicity in consequence. Irene did not know this, or, if she did, did not consider it.

"He seeks to keep me out of the country even; for how can I ever return and face the slurs of Newbridge people, for they will gossip about me though there be no occasion," she said, in distress.

"Irene! Irene!" The door opened and Celia's cheerful face peeped in. "Get ready quickly; the rain is over, and we are going to go now across the 'Bridge of Sighs' and see the palace and prison which it separates. Make haste!"

"I will join you presently," said Irene, as lightly as she was able, seeking to conceal her distress. She had not spoken of her trouble to any one, save the few words that had escaped her that day on the banks of the Arve, when she had told Celia of her husband's letter. She wrote hastily in answer to the letter she received, "I have no defence to plead; proceed without it," and, calling the servant to post it for her, she donned her bonnet and went out about the city with the others.

Beautiful Venice! Thy grandeur and magnificence sung by poets, painted by artists, set forth in prose recitals by many skilful writers, who had such appreciation of thy many splendors that in reading their descriptions of them one poor, lonely little heart at Newbridge had, not so long ago either, quickened with desire to behold what seemed like a dream that must be fully enjoyed in the reading about, as there was never a hope of looking on thee.

"If I might only see Venice!" the possessor of this same heart had many times said, yet is now walking through your streets; visiting your grand cathedrals and magnificent palaces; wandering through the noble

halls and galleries with wide-open eyes that see naught, with listening ears that hear naught, yet with heart throbbing just as wildly now as then, only not for Venice, but for that other country where home was.

They extended the journey farther than they had at first intended, this company of travellers, and it was late in the next summer when they came at length to Paris. Irene stopped at Mrs. Frothingham's home, at Celia's urgent request, and had been there but two weeks when a messenger brought to her, as she was sitting one afternoon talking and making plans with Celia for the following day, a letter from Mr. Wells, telling her he was about to remove his studio into more pleasant quarters, and enclosing a cablegram that had been sent to her in his care that day. In haste she tore it open. Its contents were soon read. Three words only,—

"You are free."

Such a pitiful moan escaped her lips that Celia went towards her and put her arms around her neck, drawing her head so that it might rest on her bosom, and said, soothingly,—

"There, dear, you have been in trouble for a long time; have it over now in a good cry, and then confide everything to me." And Irene wept so piteously that tears overflowed Celia's eyes in sympathy as she bent over her. When she had become quieted a little, and could talk without choking off each syllable with a sob, she confided the whole story of her trouble to her friend, from its beginning in the little class at Sunday-school to the end,—the cablegram.

"And is that what has been troubling you all along,

my dear?" inquired Celia, when it was ended. "Now you will certainly forgive me, if I tell you you are very foolish to grieve so; you ought to be thankful that your fate has not been any worse."

"Worse! How could it be worse?"

"Why, would it not be worse to have been obliged to live all your life with him not loving you, instead of a few months only? Let me tell you a little of my own experience. I once loved a noble lord, and he was devoted in his attentions to me. My table was filled each day with the flowers he sent to me; he was my very shadow, so attentive he became; and he was young, handsome, courteous, and a fine scholar, but poor. I did not mind his being poor, however,—I had enough and more than enough for both,—so do you wonder he found favor in my eyes? He asked me to become his wife, and I—poor, blind, silly girl that I was, believing he loved me—consented. Well, one day a good friend came whispering in my aunt's ear, 'I think it is the money that attracts the nobleman.' So my aunt went suddenly to America, and I was left in charge of a good woman in London, poor, but an excellent companion,—so merry she was all the time; and I wrote a pitiful letter to my lordly lover, telling him of the change in my fortune, returning his ring, and offering to release him from the engagement, if he wished it, since I had neither noble name nor fortune to bring to him. Did he come down upon me with a shower of soft reproaches and chidings for my hasty act, and claim me just the same? Ah, no. He wrote a dainty little letter of thanks and regrets and so on. I will show it to you some day, for I have it yet, as a

memento of the fickleness of man. And I washed out in a few tears all remembrance of the virtues which I had imagined he possessed and had fallen in love with, and returned to London to my former state just as the bells were chiming out his marriage to a French woman, a marquise, fifteen years his senior, with five children, and a fortune large enough to counterbalance all that in his eyes. Do you know that I have always been grateful to him for releasing me? for think what I escaped,—a life without love. The case is not like yours, I know, only you must not spoil that pretty face of yours with tears and vain sighings and regret, but put your sorrow in the background as I have done; forget it, and seek happiness with me in the world of art and society here in Paris. You shall henceforth be my sister. I have fortune enough for both of us, and I find such pleasure and comfort in your companionship as I have never before known. Don't waste your life in brooding over love for a man who has ceased to care for you. Come, look up and smile again; a smile has been a stranger to your face so long I shall scarcely be able to recognize it."

Oh, such a pitiful smile she summoned that Celia fell on her neck with kisses and fresh tears, saying,—

"Forgive me, dear. I did not mean to be cruel; only you will try to forget him, won't you? It is better so."

CHAPTER XXVII.

NOT many days after the cablegram had been received by Irene, there came a letter from her father full of upbraidings for her wayward course. So he designated it, bemoaning the disgrace she had been the means of bringing on herself, her home and family.

Irene was deeply pained upon first reading these harsh words and bitter reproaches, coming from where she had looked for pity and consolation, but upon reading the letter through a second and yet a third time she became so highly incensed against her father for so easily becoming prejudiced against her, that she immediately wrote a sarcastic reply, telling him that since he was willing to condemn her unheard, and considered her so disgraced, it would, perhaps, be better for them to cease all communications. She would remain where she was, and in time he might be able to forget her, and overcome the great injury she had done to his name and his home. She sent the maid to post it as soon as it was written, scarcely realizing what she was about. But there came a reaction immediately. Her mind had been so overburdened with care that it could not endure the additional weight of her father's reproaches; and her spirit that had so long been struggling to be patient and conceal every sign of sorrow, broke down completely under the strain.

For days she tossed on her bed in the delirium of fever, and her friends were despairing of her recovery

as she neared the crisis. It was passed in safety, however, for she had received careful nursing, and slowly she began to recover. During the weary hours of convalescence the consciousness of being dependent upon the generosity of Mrs. Frothingham and Celia kept forcing itself upon her; and she was taxing her mind continually in an effort to plan an independent future for herself.

"Celia," she began, one evening as she lay stretched out on a couch, near which her friend was sitting. Celia was startled at the sound of her voice, for only a moment before, noticing that she had lain for some time motionless and with closed eyelids, she had ceased reading aloud to her believing her to be asleep; now as she looked towards her she discovered her eyes wide open and fixed steadily upon her. "You know, I am poor now—I—have—nothing," Irene went on to say, taking up a rose from a table near her and nervously pulling the petals from its stem.

"There, dear, you must not say that," said Celia, coming nearer to her, and pressing a kiss on her white forehead. "I have told you already that you must share in what belongs to me. You are my chosen sister and companion; I should be unhappy without you near me, and I have so much more than I shall ever need that you must let me share with you."

"Ah, my friend, you are too generous. Already I am indebted to your aunt and yourself for more than I can ever repay, but I could never be contented to continue in this state of dependence, while I possess the means wherewith to provide for my own support; and I think I shall be able to provide enough by painting, do not you?"

"I am afraid not, Irene; there are so many artists in Paris," Celia answered disparagingly.

"But Mr. Wells has told me that I displayed skill above the average, and perhaps I might, by improving it, gain prominence and distinction some time."

"Perhaps," answered Celia, with little assurance. "Only put all such thoughts out of your head now, and get well first, then it will be time enough to think and worry about the future."

"But I cannot help thinking as I lie here, and it does me good to talk about it," Irene answered. "In a short time I will be able to begin practice, and I want to ask a favor of you now,—I have been thinking about asking it of you for some days past; it is—it is——" She hesitated.

"Well, what is it? If it is within my power, let me assure you it is granted already," said Celia.

"Well, it is this: Since I have nothing of my own, and must have help from some one if I would succeed, will you not loan me what money I shall require for my personal needs, and to pay for proper instruction in my art, until I am able to earn something by the sale of my pictures, and can repay you? You will let me have the money, I am certain, but I will never use it unless you will promise to allow me to repay it so soon as I am able."

"You poor, dear child! Certainly I will do as you request, if it will make you happier, only you must promise to stay all the while with aunt and I, and share our home with us."

"Thank you, my friend," Irene replied, earnestly; "but if I remain with you here, there is something more

I would ask. Here, let me feel your hand in mine, while I ask it, please." Celia smilingly extended her hand to Irene, whose thin white hand clasped nervously around it.

"Now, do not be impatient with me, Celia; but you know how cruel the world is in judging of any one who has been—been unfortunate like myself, and I dread its reproaches. People will not be able to understand why —why I have been divorced." Irene's hand tightened its clasp on Celia's, and her voice was scarcely audible as she spoke that last word. "I myself scarcely understand. It seems like some terrible dream. But what I want to do is to keep away from the sight of every one, save you, dear, and your aunt." Celia unconsciously drew her hand away from Irene's as she exclaimed,—

"Why, what do you mean? Do you mean that you want to seclude yourself from all society? Do you mean that you will go nowhere with me, and that you will receive no calls? Do you mean that you intend to remain shut up here all the time? Why, you would never live a year in that way. No, I will never consent to such a wild plan—never. You are mad to think of it. Why, what pleasure could I have in society, knowing that you were moping here at home by yourself? No, you must go with me if you want to please me. Suppose people do talk. They can say no harm of you, and they will grow to think so much of you as they come to know you that they will cease to remember the past at all. No, I could never assent to such a wild plan."

"Then I cannot stay here with you, Celia. I shall have to go away by myself."

"Going away by yourself? In Paris, too! Then indéed people would have reason to talk about you," interrupted Celia, impatiently. The large blue eyes that had been turned towards her so entreatingly were now suffused with tears. She waited a moment for a reply to her last outburst, but none came. She was troubled as she saw the tears, and leaning over Irene, said tenderly,—

"Forgive me for speaking so unkindly, dear, and live in retirement for a while, if you wish, until you are stronger, and think the society of others will be a comfort to you," and Irene looked the thanks she could not speak, and gave a great sigh of relief, while Celia contented herself with thinking she would easily induce her to go about every place with her when she was well and strong again.

Three years passed, and during all that time Irene had heard nothing from home. No reply had come to that letter she had written to her father in anger; and though she had since written a long letter to him, in repentance, begging to be forgiven, and one, also, to June, she had never received a line in reply. So, believing they had ceased to be interested or to care for her, and wanted to forget her, she never wrote again. She had passed these three years in earnest study and practice of her art. She had taken lessons from one of the best instructors in Paris, and sought by every available means to gain a thorough understanding of painting. She had resisted all of Mrs. Frothingham's and Celia's entreaties to go out in society; and though she left Paris whenever they left, and returned again when they returned, she always kept, as much as pos-

sible, in retirement. And Celia, though she found much pleasure in Irene's company, and though they went out often together, and read aloud to each other and had long talks that were always interesting, was not satisfied. She wanted the world to admire Irene's beauty as she herself did, so was continually urging her to appear in society.

"Wait until I have acquired fame," Irene had once answered her.

"But you will never acquire fame shut away from the world as you are!" Celia answered, impatiently; then, after a moment's consideration, said, "Will you not sacrifice yourself for my sake?"

"If it would bring you only pleasure," was Irene's reply, "I would consent to your request at once; but it would certainly bring you pain, and regret besides. You see nothing but good in me; but society would want to know all about me, and would uncover the past; and people would put their heads together, and whisper about me and pick me to pieces in such a way as might take away all the charms you now seem to discover in me."

"And will you always live thus, or only until your beauty fades, and you grow cross and sullen, and are no longer attractive to any one who does not know you as I do?—for like that you are certain to become if you continue by yourself," Celia replied. Irene made no answer, but silently seemed to ponder over what her friend had said, until vexed at her seeming indifference, Celia arose and went out of the room, leaving her to herself.

"Oh, if I but knew of some means of inducing her

to come out of her seclusion!" she said, in a fit of impulsiveness, a half-hour later, to the Count Beaurynski, who was calling, and who had inquired after Irene. "She is just pining away for want of the gay life of the social world, and looks so sad always that my heart aches on seeing her. I have offered every inducement in my power to suggest, without avail; and if she does not soon seek the change, she will assuredly die."

The Count started.

"Is there really no possible way of inducing her to change her mind?" he inquired, anxiously.

"No; none whatever, I fear. She says she will go everywhere with me when her pictures sell, and people talk of her present and future instead of her past,—a hopeless outlook."

"Why does she not then offer her pictures for sale?" he inquired.

"She has offered two charming pictures for almost a year now, yet no purchaser has been found for them. Why will no one buy them, I wonder? The price is very low, and the pictures have merit."

Without seeming to heed the question, the Count inquired where the pictures were exhibited, and soon after took his leave.

"Celia, Celia; the pictures have both been sold at last," cried out Irene, bursting into her friend's room unceremoniously the afternoon following, and handing her an open letter to read.

Celia read the letter, which was from the art dealer with whom the pictures had been left, and understood, though she never ventured to hint to Irene, who had been the purchaser.

The Count Beaurynski had first learned of the unfortunate ending of Irene's marriage through her aunt, whom he had met accidentally in London at the opera, shortly after the divorce had been granted. He had gone over to the box in which she sat with a small party of friends, and when, in the course of conversation, he had inquired about her niece she had told him about the divorce. Never should he forget the cold, heartless way in which she commented on the unfortunate affair.

"Of course, it was very scandalous," she said. "I never knew what the trouble really was,—Irene was always so odd. Desertion was the plea; but dear me, he was down to the boat to see her off when she sailed, so, of course, there was nothing in that: it was but an excuse for obtaining the divorce. Yes, she was my sister's daughter, and I was completely broken up about it. I really don't know where she is now,—you see I neglected to keep up the correspondence with her,—somewhere in Paris, I presume, though, trying to paint. She was always wild about painting. Dear me, here comes my husband; of course, you knew I was married again? No?" and she introduced a great, coarse, brawny, red-faced German to him with whom he had talked a moment, excusing himself as soon as possible.

Immediately upon his return to Paris, he had learned Irene's whereabouts from Mr. Wells, and called at Mrs. Frothingham's many times thereafter in hope of seeing her, without ever once succeeding.

Though he was puzzled to understand why her husband had divorced her, nevertheless he felt certain that whatever the true cause might be, Irene had been

guilty of no wrong-doing, and satisfied in knowing that she was free, had permitted wild hopes for a future with her as his wife to spring into life within his breast. He wanted to be near her; he wanted to see her, and talk with her; and almost in despair, on account of his many futile attempts to secure an interview with her, he confided the whole story of his love for her to his mother, telling her all he knew of her past and present, and begging her to help him to devise some means of seeing her again. But the Countess Beaurynski was shocked at this disclosure of her son's love for a woman of such plebeian birth and about whose past the scandal of a divorce hovered, and tried to reason with him in hope of inducing him to forego all thought of such an alliance, urging him to remember his family, and his long line of ancestry, thus far unmixed with any blood of common people, but he would infallibly and stolidly answer all her arguments,—

"I love her, and will marry her or no one."

She almost despaired of ever shaking his purpose; grieved over his changed appearance, and sorrowed because he was unhappy, without ever relenting or entertaining a thought of aiding him in the furtherance of his desires. He had told her that Irene was an artist, but she attached no importance to that fact, even though she had admired the pictures which he had shown to her from her brush, for she had never heard her pictures spoken of nor her name mentioned by any one else. Yet there came a time when the papers all noticed a picture of hers—"An Ideal Head" —that was hanging in the *Salon;* and everybody who had seen it was talking about it and asking everybody

else who they thought "Norma" might be. The Countess Beaurynski most willingly assented when her son invited her to go with him and see it, and stood almost one-half hour before it, among a crowd of others enchained there in a study of the singular expression and peculiar beauty of the subject, being interested also in listening to the expressed opinions of those near her.

"Take me to see her," she said to him, as soon as they were out of the throng. "Take me to see her. I do not favor your suit, but I am curious to see the woman who conceived and painted that picture." And the Count, fearful lest she should change her mind if he delayed taking her, even though he doubted whether Irene could be induced to receive her, gave Mrs. Frothingham's address to the footman and ordered that they be driven there at once.

While the Count Beaurynski and his mother were on their way to visit Irene, she was seated in her room listening intently to Celia as she read aloud the following extract from one of the daily papers: "Among the many excellent pictures on exhibition in the *Salon*, one is extremely fascinating. The subject is 'An Ideal Head,' and the artist, 'Norma,'—unknown to the artistic world. The picture is of a woman, and only the head and throat are visible on a background of dark clouds. The head appears as if tossed backward in coquettish manner, and a mocking, but not malicious, smile rests about the lips, which are rather full and slightly parted, disclosing faultless teeth. The eyes, which are of a soft, dark hazel, have a far-away look in them, and the short, curling, auburn hair forms an exquisite frame for this most interesting face. As I

studied this picture closely I discovered its chief charm to be in the eyes, which appear so lifelike in their expression that it is difficult to realize they are but painted; and the dreamy look in them, contrasted with the smiling lips, seems to present two sides of a life, and leads one to stop and ponder over, without quite understanding, the strange combination. The air of mystery that seems to encompass both artist and picture, aside from the real merit the work possesses, make it quite the fashion to visit it. Hence the great popularity it has attained."

"There, my dear; how do you like that?" inquired Celia, with dancing eyes, as she finished.

"Oh, Celia, I owe all this praise, all the distinction I have gained through this picture to you, who had sufficient confidence in its merits to think of having it hung in the *Salon!*" was Irene's only reply.

"It is indeed a great debt," said Celia, "and one that I cannot permit to go unpaid; and I insist on your paying it by degrees as I now dictate. You must drive in the Bois with aunt and I this afternoon, and wear what I shall advise; then you must go to-night to the opera with us, and receive calls with us to-morrow in the drawing-room, and be presented to our friends, and——"

"Celia, Celia; not all at once! I will go everywhere with you; only let me go by degrees, for I shall be like a child taking its first steps; and if you do not give me time to learn you will be pained at sight of my blunders." Just as Irene finished speaking there came a rap at the door, and the maid entered bearing cards on a salver.

"For Mrs. Raynor and yourself," said the maid, as Celia took up the cards and read the names of the Count and Countess Beaurynski.

"Say we will be down immediately," she said, dismissing her and turning towards Irene, who wore a questioning, half-frightened look on her face; without venturing a word of explanation she took a bunch of pink roses from a vase on the mantel, and hastily drying their stems, pinned them at Irene's throat, saying,—

"You shall take your first step now, by going down with me to the parlor to receive the Count Beaurynski and his mother, who have come to call upon you," and, without waiting for her to venture a word of remonstrance, she took her by the arm and hurried her from the room.

The Count was awaiting Irene's approach in almost breathless silence, while his mother chatted away lightly and easily with Mrs. Frothingham, whom she had met on several occasions. She stopped suddenly, however, in the midst of a sentence upon looking up and seeing Celia and Irene enter the parlor together. So completely was she taken by surprise at sight of Irene that she almost lost her customary self-possession on arising to greet her. She had not expected to see so young a woman, and was overcome with silent admiration of the graceful figure clad all in white, with a mass of golden hair like a halo of glory about the pink and white face that turned towards her with such a pleading, hunted look, as made her long to offer assurance of enduring friendship. The Count was almost speechless with joy at sight of the idol of his heart once again

after so many months of weary waiting, and though there were many things he longed to say to her, he was content to look on silently as she conversed with his mother, all the while building his hopes anew for the future more extravagantly than ever before.

"She is certainly very beautiful, remarkably so, and I am willing to do all in my power to advance her socially and make her a success. It is a good time to do that, now that her picture has attracted so much attention," said the Countess Beaurynski to her son, as they drove away from Mrs. Frothingham's.

"Oh, mother, mother," said the Count, taking up her hand and clasping it in both his own,—"And you will help me to win her? Will you not?"

"There, my son, there is time enough for that when we see what she will do, and how successful she will become in society," she answered, and he was content to wait, feeling sure that Irene would prove all that his mother could desire. The Countess had been much pleased with Irene; but by no means had she become reconciled to the thought of having her for a daughter-in-law; yet, knowing that her son would never give her up so long as there was a chance of winning her, and believing, after carefully noting Irene's meeting with him, that his affection at present met with no response in her breast, she reasoned that, on account of her beauty and her reputation as an artist, she was certain to become popular and would command much attention from every one, and some other man might become entranced with her charms who would find more favor in her sight than her son.

Not three weeks after the Countess Beaurynski had

first called on Irene, she gave a reception at her house, and had the pleasure of presenting to her friends, on that occasion, the much-talked-of artist "Norma," for it certainly was a pleasure to introduce so beautiful, and, at the same time, talented a woman, and no one, if they knew of her humble origin, would venture to slight, or fail to accept most graciously and kindly, any one the Countess Beaurynski would favor.

She introduced her to every one as "Norma," and though it seemed odd so to present her, it was Irene's expressed wish to Mrs. Frothingham, and through her to the Countess. When Mrs. Frothingham had argued that the name was too familiar for a stranger to use in addressing her, she replied,—

"The stranger will doubtless of his own accord address me as madame; and now I am nothing to the world but 'Norma,' a painter of pictures, so let that suffice."

From the time when she became known to society, all Paris was repeating her name. They spoke of her often as the lovely American who painted so exquisitely. Speedily there arose a desire for her pictures, and she worked hard to complete some half-finished ones that had been lying about in her studio for months, and sent them to be sold, asking treble the price she would before have thought of valuing them at, though nothing she ever painted could compare with that "Ideal Head" that had brought her fame. They found speedy sale among her admirers.

"Bah! why is there such a craze over that artist 'Norma'? Her paintings are daubs beside some pictures I have seen from greater artists, better known,

whose works do not sell for half the price she asks for hers," said one member of the English nobility to a Parisian. They had paused before a new picture from Irene's brush while walking through one of the art galleries of Paris.

"People are willing to pay the price: why should she not ask it? Artists generally seek for their work all they can get," was the reply.

"Yes, to be sure they do; but why do people pay it? It seems foolish, incredible, that any one in his right mind would ever pay fifteen thousand francs for this little picture of a Swiss peasant girl and her lover."

"Ah, but it is not so much the subject as the work and the expression, and—the artist."

"I admit that the picture has merit, but the price, the price asked for it is outrageous!"

A sudden inspiration came to his friend the Parisian.

"Have you seen her?" he inquired.

"Who? Norma? No."

"Come drive with me on the Bois, she will be there in an hour; she drives there almost every day about the same time; and, after you have seen her, you will be better able to understand why her pictures sell for the price they do."

A fair young face, with large blue eyes overflowing with expression, a delicate pink and white complexion, and golden hair,—all this and a mass of feathers and lace of some light shade; he never noticed what shade, so absorbed had he been with the face, and so quickly had it passed him by, this critic, this English nobleman, an hour later as he was driving with his friend.

"Jupiter! George, who is that woman?" he ex-

claimed, turning and looking after the carriage they had just passed.

"Which one? There were three."

"I saw but one,—such delicate, exquisite loveliness as I have never looked on before!—the one with the golden hair."

"Oh, that one? Did you notice her? Why, that was 'Norma,'" answered his friend, silently enjoying the surprise depicted on the other's countenance.

"What, that young thing?"

"Why, man, she is a woman, young of course, yet she it is who is turning half the heads in Paris. Go to the Embassy ball to-night, you will doubtless meet her there,—the Countess Beaurynski will present you, if you so request her, and one more will be added to her train of devoted followers."

The Englishman did go to the ball; was presented to 'Norma,' who only smiled, and spoke a word or two to him pleasantly, as she had done to many others that same evening; but the next day he went back to the picture-gallery and paid fifteen thousand francs for the picture of a Swiss peasant girl and her lover.

Such was the popularity Irene had attained, every one seemed charmed by, and sought to pay tribute to her youth and beauty, yet she favored no one more than another. She was invited to every entertainment of note. She never declined going anywhere with Mrs. Frothingham and Celia, and she always attracted attention and admiration wherever she appeared. Her costumes were made by the most skilful of Parisian *modistes*, and were marvels of art, designed to set off every charm of her form and face. She wore

diamonds, too, and they added brilliancy to her beauty. She had come entirely out of her seclusion, and was seeking happiness in a world that gossiped and gossiped about her past, yet unable to trace up any error in it was willing to pay homage at the shrine of her beauty. And she laughed, and talked pleasantly to every one, and seemed to enjoy it all. Celia thought so at any rate, never dreaming of the many nights when the beautiful eyes had wept secretly, after returning from entertainments where their owner had been in receipt of more attention and admiration than any other woman present, where she had overheard a whispered malicious reference to her past.

Two years were thus spent by Irene, and at the end of that time the Count Beaurynski was no nearer the realization of his hopes than at the beginning. Once he had ventured to speak to her of love, and she had begged him to desist, as her heart was buried in the past. Two years "Norma" had been prominent in society, when suddenly she disappeared from it just as mysteriously as she had entered it, and was heard of no more.

She had wearied of the world before it had wearied of her, and sadly recalled how, in childhood's days, she had often thought that she would be supremely happy if she could but wear beautiful dresses and diamonds, and go into society, and have everybody admiring her; —if she could acquire fame, and have people look after her as she passed through a drawing-room or along the street, mentioning her name with praise and honor! It had all been granted to her, only in a greater degree than she had ever dreamed of. Many nobles were in

her train, ready to lay their hearts and titles at her feet. Yet one day, while her glory was at its height, she felt an irresistible longing to go back to dear old Newbridge, to go again through the rooms, and look on the homely walls that had once been home; to take her father's hand, and hear him say that he cared for her still, and had forgiven the mistakes she had made; to look into little June's bright eyes that were always laughing. Little! Why, she must be tall now,—a young woman. Ten and six are sixteen. And it had been six years since she had seen her last, and the desire increased as she realized what a time it had been since she had separated from father and sister.

"Dear Irene, I have found a conquering hero at last," said Celia, coming into her room one of those days while she was thinking of home; and sitting down by her side, in excess of happiness, she poured out a tale of love that brought tears to her listener's eyes, so lonely it made her feel. He had no line of noble ancestry, this lover of hers; but he was one of her own countrymen, handsome, gifted, richer than she was, even; and he loved her, and was loved by her in return,—the same old story over again. Irene listened, and a void seemed forming in her life.

"If you would only consent to listen to the Count Beaurynski, dear, you, too, would be happy, I am certain. He is so good, so noble, so considerate, you would never have cause for regret, I am sure."

"No, no, Celia. Please do not speak of it. I have no room for him in my heart; it is filled already by another. I am glad, though, that you are so happy,

because you deserve to be. And now you will be so engrossed with your lover's company that you will not miss me if I go away for a little while,—back to Newbridge, where I spent my childhood's days,—only for a visit, dear," she said, as her friend was about to remonstrate,—"only for a short visit. I will return again, I promise you; only I want to see my father and sister. I have not heard from them in a long while,—and they are over there, you know."

"Ay,—and so is your heart, poor child. God grant you may find it again and be happy," thought Celia, as she kissed her friend lovingly, and left her alone with her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was in the Fall of the year. The leaves were just beginning to turn, and the yellow daisies to dry up on their stems, when among the passengers that alighted from the west-bound train at Newbridge were two women,—one, elegantly attired, tall, and of such graceful mien that, instinctively, one felt that her face must be beautiful, though it was hidden from sight behind the thick veil that covered it. She leaned on the arm of the other woman, who was evidently a servant. Entering one of the carriages in waiting, a number was given by the maid to the cabman, and they were driven away. They stopped a few moments later before the door of the house that had once been John Patton's home, and the lady alighted, while the maid remained seated in the carriage.

The neighbors who were within seeing distance as they drove up, hung over the fences or gathered in groups on the sidewalk, making wild guesses as to who the grand lady could be who had come thus among them; gossiping and chattering among themselves while they awaited her return to the carriage. The children playing about in the street all flocked to the sidewalk in front of it, and, filing themselves in double line, stood staring at the horses and driver and remaining occupant.

The woman who alighted—Irene, as you have already guessed—threw back her veil as she opened the gate, and a look of pain flitted over her face as she noted the neglected and dilapidated appearance of the house and its surroundings. The shutters were loosened from their hinges; the steps and floor of the portico were broken; the vines that her mother had so carefully trained to climb up over its sides and roof for so many years were all gone—torn away; the plot of ground that had once been so green was now dead, and strewn about with papers, sticks, scraps of twine, broken toys, dishes, and crockery. Not a flower was to be seen where morning-glories and nasturtiums used to climb and blossom,—no trace of the plot where geraniums and verbenas had once flourished; but, instead, an air of ruin and desolation pervaded the whole place. All this she noted in one sweeping glance, and went on up to the door, with a dread at her heart that all was not well with her father, or he never would have permitted this change to come to his home.

She rang the bell,—which reverberated with a hollow, jingling sound throughout the house,—and heard,

presently, heavy, shuffling shoes advancing over a bare floor, followed by the pattering of the bare feet of children. The door opened, and a strange woman, in slovenly apparel, holding a young babe in her arms and followed by two dirty children clutching at her dress, stared at her from within.

"Good-morning, madame," said Irene, as pleasantly as she could; "may I beg a few minutes' conversation with you?" She did not want to talk with her at the door with all those women outside gaping at her.

"Yes'm," the woman answered, in a coarse, grating voice, staring at Irene from head to foot all the while. "Jest walk in this way, ma'am." And she opened the door of the room that had once been their parlor. What a change was there,—a few pieces of plain furniture scattered about, a faded, ragged carpet on the floor, dirt and disorder everywhere.

She dropped down wearily on the nearest chair, the woman taking a seat opposite her, with her babe on her lap and the two other children standing one on each side of her staring with wide-open eyes at Irene, who began by saying,—

"I came to inquire after a man who once lived here, John Patton."

"John Patton? La, me, he has been dead this three years past."

"Dead!" Irene gasped, starting forward with staring eyes and whitening lips, believing she had not heard aright.

"Why, yes'm; he used to live here with Mr. Bouser, our landlord, the man as owns the house, and used to live here himself once. John Patton boarded with his

folks then, though I never knew him; but I lived in the next street, and did know, as everybody around knows, that he never was the same after his wife died; and after his oldest daughter ran away with another man, and left her husband and sister and him, he sort of crazed like, they say, and then he lost his job, and finally he up and died one day, about three years past now."

"Was he alone when he died? I mean was any of his family with him?"

"Why, yes. After the oldest daughter left her husband and went to Europe, the youngest one came home to her father, and she was with him all the while till he died."

"Where is she now?"

"Well, when the old man died, they do say that Mr. Raynor, the husband of the one who ran away, came here and gave him a decent buryin', as he had nothing left when he died, having sold all of his property from time to time to pay his living expenses; and so, after the funeral, Mr. Raynor took the other girl away with him again. I can't say where she is now; but I know she didn't have nothing to live on when her father died, for he'd even neglected to keep up his insurance on his life, they say, when he got weak-minded, and so there was nothing from there. I don't know where the girl is now, but I'll tell you what it is, I shouldn't wonder but Mr. Bird the 'piscopal minister could tell; he lives in the Raynors' house, and Mr. Raynor stops there always when he is in town. He and the minister always was sort of chummy; lived together, and all that, before they went away from here."

The woman was in her element, retailing gossip whenever opportunity afforded; perhaps, had she loved less to hang on the fence and talk with her neighbors her house might not have suffered so much from lack of proper care and attention. She had revelled in the same gossip at the time it first started; it was an old story now, but she was happy in telling it to a new listener.

"Tell me," said Irene, as she arose to go, "who said that she, the married one, had gone away with another man?"

"La me, miss, everybody knew of it. I couldn't say any more who first told it; though, now I think of it, Minnie Barnes, old Jim Barnes's daughter, could tell you; she knows all about it; she used to be awful thick with Frank Raynor's wife before they were married; and she said that she, his wife, was in love with some Count or Lord before she was married, and that she only married Mr. Raynor for spite, and ran away to Europe with the foreigner after all."

"Did she tell that to you?"

"No, miss. I never knew her to speak to, but Mrs. Carson said as how she just up and asked her one day when she was passing, having heard that she knew all about it and had told it to others, and so got the truth of it from her own lips."

"Thank you," said Irene, turning to go.

"What name may yours be, miss?" inquired the woman, curiously, as she followed her to the door.

"No matter; you would not know me; here is something for your trouble," and thrusting a gold piece in the woman's hand she entered the carriage and was driven away.

The women along the street came flocking to learn who the lady was who came driving in a carriage, so elegantly dressed, and so early in the morning, to call on one of their neighbors.

"And, indeed, it's just come to me," answered the woman, still staring at the gold,—"it's just this moment come to me that it was Frank Raynor's wife herself, come back at this late day to look after her poor old father." And they gossiped and surmised with nodding heads and overwise countenances out there on the sidewalk.

Irene meanwhile was riding out towards the cemetery, where all that remained of the parent she had come to seek now lay. The old sexton led the way to the grave, at her request. She felt so weak, and everything seemed so strange and unreal to her troubled mind that she feared to venture alone to where he had at first but directed her, lest some mishap should befall her.

She found there two hillocks side by side, and two tombstones of the same shape and size. On the one an inscription, giving the dates of the birth and death of her mother, and on the other the name of her father, and the date of his death, with this inscription beneath, "He giveth his beloved sleep."

The sexton walked aside that he might not intrude on her sorrow. And, overcome with grief and remorse, she threw herself on the ground, at the foot of the latest gravestone, with such expression of anguish as he had seldom witnessed before.

He knew it was the absent daughter, though he had never seen her, but he had heard the story of her life,

as the others had, and he thought she had returned repentant, though too late.

Poor Irene, she could recall nothing, as she wept there, but the tear-blistered letter that had come to her before she had left her native country.

"I want to see my girls. I want them near me." And she had not heeded, but had gone out in the world, with no thought save of self and the pursuit of her own happiness all these years. She thought of the last time she had seen him, walking away from the train, wiping the tears from his eyes, and turning again for a last look at his girls, who were leaving him. The selfish heart will come to remember, some day, cross words, broken promises, forgotten kindnesses, and that one word, remorse, carries a weight of meaning with it then for such an one.

She turned from the graves finally, and retracing her steps to the carriage, directed the driver to go to the home of Mr. Bird. When they stopped before the house she made no move to alight for several moments, seeking to first gain command of her grief, which seemed overpowering at the time; for, besides the painful recollections of a mistaken past, a wrecked happiness, and wasted opportunities, which sight of the house awakened, came the thought that perhaps she might no longer be permitted to call its present occupants her friends since the world had undertaken to explain her absence as it had. Yet realizing that she must go within just the same, in order to learn the whereabouts of her sister, she said to her maid,—

"Come in here with me, Maria," and alighted from the carriage. She walked slowly up the path leading

to the door, and paused with her hand on the bell-knob, at the sound of a voice, familiar to her in the past, calling her name.

"Irene! Irene! what are you doing? Come here to me at once." The voice came out through an open window above her head. She pulled the bell with sudden force, in her anxiety to respond to the summons.

The door was opened by her former servant, Arsine.

"The Lord save us,—the missus!" she exclaimed, starting back at the sight of her, and, without waiting to invite her to enter, she ran hastily into another room, calling out, "Mrs. Bird! Mrs. Bird! do come down at once. Mrs. Raynor's come back!"

Dora hurried below, scarcely able to understand what Arsine was saying, and upon encountering Irene, was so overcome by her surprise that she could only exclaim, with no other attempt at greeting,—

"You here?"

"Yes," Irene gasped in reply. "You saw me from the window, did you not? You called my name?"

"Oh, did you hear me? That was my little Irene,—my child I was calling, whom I named after you; this little thing," she said, as she drew to herself and put one arm about a little girl, who had followed her into the room; "and this is Frank, my boy," she said, as she put the other arm about a boy younger than the girl.

It seemed to Irene, as this explanation was given, and as each arm of her friend encircled her children, as if there was no room left for her. She attempted to speak, but her lips only trembled, and would not articulate a syllable. Her form tottered, and she was about to fall, when instantly the arms that a moment

before had entwined the children were thrown about the wavering figure, and warm kisses were showered on her face as gentle words of welcome fell on her ear.

It was too much for her to bear, after the morning's bitter experience, and she broke into a torrent of tears that spoke plainer than words to the sympathetic heart beside her of pain, sorrow, and remorse.

"Lie here awhile, until you are stronger," said Dora, tenderly, leading her to a sofa at one end of the room. "There, do not say a word," she added, as Irene was attempting to make reply. "I will have Arsine make you a nice cup of tea,—it will do you a world of good,—and, afterwards, we will talk over everything."

The tea was brought, and was so refreshing that, after drinking it, Irene immediately begged her friend to take her into a room where they might talk together, alone and undisturbed.

"Come right in here, dear,—your own room, you see, which I have kept as well as I could, just as you left it, feeling sure you would return some day to visit us, and occupy it again. Now, if you feel strong enough, tell me all about your trouble, from the beginning, if you will. I promise, beforehand, not to chide, but to give you my sympathy; for I am sure there is a different story from that which the world tells, and I want to learn it from your own lips."

"Do they really say that I went away with another?"

"Some idle gossip-mongers have said so; but we have denied and never believed it, dear."

"But what does he—Frank say?"

"Nothing. He never refers to the past in any way,

before us, so we keep silent on the subject when he is here; but tell me, how come you to be here now, without my knowing it?"

"I came back to visit my father and sister," spoke the faltering lips.

"Your father?" began Mrs. Bird, in a low voice. "Ah, you already know," she said, as Irene buried her face in her hands. "Don't grieve so, dear. I think he is happier now with your mother, whose loss he continually mourned; and June——"

"Yes; tell me about my sister,—where is she?" interrupted Irene.

"She is in New York with Frank and his mother; contented, happy, and well cared for, let me assure you. I will tell you how she came to be with them, after you have told me all about yourself."

It was a long story; but Irene told all the circumstances that had influenced her marriage and separation, even to the love that was concealed in her breast for him who had been her husband. The words of sympathy and encouragement the confession called forth from her listener brought true comfort to her bruised heart.

"Do you really believe that he hates me?" she inquired, when she had finished. "I could be better contented with my present lot if I but knew that he did not hate me."

"Hate you? No heart has ever known more enduring love than his has been all the while, notwithstanding the tests it has had! I am certain of this, though he has never told me so. Look up, Irene, and hope. The future is still bright before you; think what

happiness it may yet hold for you! There exists some grievous misunderstanding that will certainly be explained in time." Then this good friend confided to Irene all she knew about her father and June, and finished by saying,—

"You must remain with us for a time, and I will send for June to come here without delay. It will be pleasanter for you both to meet here, and you will be together just as soon. No, you must not write to her; let me do that. I want her to be surprised, and not to know until she sees you that you are awaiting her here, and you must rest meanwhile and make ready to welcome her."

Irene consented to follow her friend's advice; yet she wondered all the while whether it was possible that Dora feared June had been prejudiced against her and would not come where she was, if she was to have knowledge beforehand that she was to meet her.

The minister's greeting was very cordial; and Irene found much comfort in the society of these two friends and their children, while she waited for her sister's coming.

"June will be here to-night," said Dora to Irene, one morning just two days after her arrival; "and since the day will seem long with waiting, and the weather is so unusually warm and pleasant for this time of year, suppose we take a drive out into the country, a short distance. It will be a pleasant way of passing the time and will make it seem shorter." Irene gladly acquiesced to this plan of her friend's, and they rode out together; and went so very far out into the country that before their return (as Dora drove slowly,

seeming in no haste to get back) Irene grew weary and cold, and was greatly relieved to get into the warm atmosphere of her friend's house.

"Just wait here a minute," said Dora, as soon as they entered the parlor, going out of the room before Irene had time to reply. She came back almost instantly, however, and said with mocking authority in her manner,—

"I wish you would go to your room, remove your wraps, and come back here immediately. I have prepared a pleasant little surprise for you, and will await you here."

Irene laughed, then said excitedly,—

"Is June here already?"

"You are expecting June to-day, therefore seeing her will be no surprise. No, it is not that; and you will not be able to discover until you come back, so if you are curious—hasten."

Irene hurried away, wondering what it was that her friend had in her mind that made her eyes look so much brighter than usual. When she descended again to the parlor, and had her hand on the knob of the door about to open it, it opened for her from within; and she looked up, speechless with amazement, on discovering her former husband standing before her.

He grasped her by the hand and led her within, saying excitedly and passionately,—

"Irene, my beloved, forgive me. Mr. Bird has told me how I have misunderstood you all along; forgive me, and tell me that you love me still. I never dreamed that it was your cousin you cared for, but thought always that it was the Count Beaurynski."

"The Count Beaurynski!" exclaimed Irene, in amazement.

"Yes, yes. You see he sent a man here to inquire about your family, and then he went away so suddenly after he discovered you were poor; and you seemed troubled when you read his hasty farewell on a card the day I called at your aunt's. Do you remember? And you always blushed and was confused whenever his name was mentioned, never speaking it or referring to him yourself; you were overcome at sight of him when you encountered him again after we had gone to live in the city. How could I help but believe that it was he you had meant, when you wrote that you loved another. Then, too, when you were so determined to go abroad, he sailed on the same boat with you."

"You did not believe——" Irene began.

"No, no; I know what you would say. No, I never doubted you. I thought only that you hated me and wanted to be near him, and I made you free that you might be happier. Heavens, what a fool I have been! And I never dreamed that you cared anything for me. Oh, to think of the time that has been wasted in doubt! Tell me that it is not yet too late to retrieve the past."

She never spoke a word, but her eyes answered him; he put his arms about her, drawing her to him in loving embrace, and both were comforted in each other's love at last.

Need I tell you that this meeting had been pre-arranged by the two friends who had always contended that they owed their own happy union to Irene and Frank. It had only required a telegram of a few words,—"Come, and bring June; have news of Irene."

That was all that had been said, but it was enough; and they both came at once, arriving in the morning, as they were expected, instead of in the evening. Need I tell you how the minister, while his wife was driving with Irene, had met and poured into his friend's ears the story of a loving, lonely, and suffering heart just as it had been confided to his wife, and by her to him? Need I tell you how, when Frank had learned of the love that had been wasting all these years, and of how he had misunderstood Irene, he could scarcely wait until he should see her again and entreat her forgiveness and revel in the wealth of affection that had been shut up in both hearts so long? No; I think I needed not to have told all this, you must already have guessed it.

They lingered there in the parlor undisturbed for some time, there was so much for both to explain and talk over, for Irene had insisted on relating the part the Count Beaurynski had taken in her life from the beginning of her acquaintance with him until the end, and Frank wanted to tell her how he had missed her all the years they had been separated, and how he never ceased to hope for her return, and how Mr. Blaisdell had died soon after she had gone away, and made him rich by bequeathing to him his share of the stock in the company of which he had been president. And so much more there was to tell that he had not time to speak of because June, impatient to see her sister again, could wait no longer and burst in upon them unexpectedly in the midst of their converse. What a grand reunion it was, to be sure! such a flood of happiness it seemed to Irene, that she almost felt repaid for the weary years of waiting.

The saddest part of this meeting—for there is always a sad side to every great happiness—was the quiet marriage ceremony that took place in the little parlors of home—their old home—that same evening, when Irene and Frank were again united for life; recalling, as it did, so vividly another ceremony just as quiet in which the same persons took active part.

"God bless and make you both happy for the rest of your days," said the minister, fervently, as he this second time pronounced them man and wife.

"And you, too, my friend; may he bless you and yours as you so richly deserve," said Frank, in reply.

CHAPTER XXIX.

And what of all the rest? I hear you ask, as I near the close of my story. Tell me what became of June, Aunt Mollie, Celia Frothingham, Mr. Wells, Minnie Barnes, Robert Bostwick, and the Count Beaurynski. And it is my intention to tell you now, for you are liable to meet one or all of them some time, as they are all still living while I write, and you might be pleased to recognize them.

Mrs. Bostwick—or Mrs. Gubenhauser, as she was then called—was travelling in Europe at the time of John Patton's death; and June, finding herself left alone, homeless and penniless, with no way of providing her own support, and no one to whom she could look for assistance of any kind, was in the depths

of despair, when Frank Raynor, who had learned of her loss and consequent condition through Marshall Bird, came to Newbridge, and offered her a home with his mother and himself until her aunt should return. And June, after some urging, accepted; for, notwithstanding he had divorced her sister, the sisterly affection she had always felt for him was living in her heart yet,—and, besides, there seemed left to her no other choice than to accept his generous invitation. So she had returned with him to the city, and had remained with him ever since. When her aunt returned from abroad, and had sent for her to come and make her home with her, June had betrayed such reluctance that Frank said to her,—

"June, if you prefer to go with your aunt, I have no desire or right to prevent your doing so; only I wish to say to you first, in order that you may be better able to follow your own inclinations, that nothing gives me more pleasure now than to have your bright face about my house. You are welcome here, and more than welcome. It pains me to think of having you live elsewhere. I am able to provide for you bountifully, and am well repaid in having your cheering presence in my home to lighten my dull hours. Your aunt is a woman of the world, who thinks of nothing but the world and what it does and says. I have never been able to discover that she possessed a heart; therefore, I think she can never know such warm affection for you as is felt by my mother and myself. Besides, June," and his voice sank very low, "she was the first person to turn from your sister after she went away, condemning her in the world of society wherever her name was spoken,

when she should have defended her or kept silent. Go with her if you prefer, only I long to have you still abide with me." And June had put her arms about his neck and begged to remain with him.

She had never been allowed to answer Irene's letter, or even to speak her name in her father's presence, so severely prejudiced against her had he become on hearing the malicious gossip that was talked about her. It never occurred to him that the stories might not be true. His mind and body had both grown so weak from constant brooding over the loss of his wife that he had become incapable of proper reasoning. He looked upon that sarcastic letter she had written him in anger as conclusive evidence of her depravity, and had never answered it.

"She has gone to the bad," he would say to June. "Your mother always said no good would come of the marriage,—and she was right; your mother was always right. And I don't wish you to write to her nor to have her writing to you, for she'll be trying to coax you away from me after awhile,—and you are all I have left now." And June, though she ceased to write and to hear from Irene, had not ceased to think of her. She wanted to tell her of her father's death, only she did not know where a letter would reach her, her father having destroyed all the letters containing her address. Some time after she had taken up her abode with Frank, however, she ventured to ask him if he knew anything of Irene's whereabouts, and amazed at learning that there had been no communication between the sisters for years, he supplied her with the address Irene had given him at parting to Mr. Wells's

former studio in Paris. He himself had lost track of her, though he had kept track of the Count Beaurynski; and, knowing him to be still unmarried, believed that Irene had been forsaken by him, and had made himself almost sick at times by imagining her heart-broken and friendless—perhaps in want—in a strange land. These thoughts made him all the more anxious to keep June near him, that, through her, he might learn of Irene, and, perhaps, be permitted to see and talk with her, and even be of assistance to her when she came back; for he believed she was certain to return some time to see her sister. Doubtless, she would return as soon as she learned of her father's death; and, perhaps—who could tell?—perhaps she might learn to love him after the dreary years of separation, having suffered so much away from him. So he had reasoned; and all these hopes took wing when he learned that June—even June—knew nothing more than he did of her sister. June wrote a long letter at once to the address Frank had given her, but it was never answered, not having been received by Irene.

It was a pity that it went astray, it carried such a wealth of love in it for the absent one, just pining away for the want of such a letter. But the love was there in June's heart, still waiting to outpour itself when Irene should return to her, and she always expected her to come back some day. She lives yet with Frank and Irene in New York, and a happier family does not exist in the great city.

Mrs. Bostwick still flits about in society there, gossiping and chattering away as gayly as ever, although traces of age and care have made their appearance on

her countenance. You would hardly believe that she was other than contented always; but I have heard it whispered by some, who know her intimately, that her second marriage is not an agreeable one, that the coarse, red-faced German whom she wedded has neither the refinement nor the devotion that characterized her former husband, and little to recommend him to society save his money. But he is seen everywhere with her. And, though they say she is not as popular as she once was, because of her husband they cannot refuse to receive her; and then the whole world does not know that he drinks beer until he is stupid every night before going to bed.

Robert Bostwick turned away from Irene the day she chided him on the beach at Long Branch, and went back to the city, where he remained all through the summer, in a sort of self-imposed punishment for his unmanly conduct, and two years later was attracted by a pretty face that reminded him of Irene's. The station of the young woman who possessed it was humble, and her people were poor, yet he pushed himself into her home and heart, won her love and married her. His mother was wild with anger—the first time she was ever known to betray passion or emotion of any kind—when she heard of this alliance; but she had a weakness for a pretty face in a woman, and when she afterwards saw this one, she admired her, kissed her on both cheeks, forgave her son, and consoled herself by saying,—"he might have done worse."

Minnie Barnes is smiling yet. She lives with her people at Newbridge, and is still unmarried. She dresses daintily and prettily, too young though, some

have thought, for her years; her manners are propriety itself, and she talks with such exact articulation and nicety of phrasing as to become wearisome to a listener, and still answers every suggestion you make to her, as formerly, "Oh, yes." "Oh," away up in the clouds, and "yes" seeking the depths of the earth, all the time smiling while seeming to ponder over what you have been saying. Her father's frequent disgraceful escapades are generally known and much commented on among Newbridge people; perhaps that may be the reason she herself has never advanced in society. She has had no intimate associate since Irene, and every one speaks of her always as "old Jim Barnes's daughter;" yet she smiles all the while, and seems never to heed the reproach. She drives out occasionally in the family phaeton with her mother, who is known only by sight to but few. I caught sight of them once as they passed me, and was deeply impressed with the appearance of Mrs. Barnes; she had such a delicate, sad little face, with great dark circles under her eyes, which peered out from underneath one of her daughter's hats which she wore. I think she has no hat of her own, having so little need for one, perhaps. I thought, as I saw her that time, that there are hopes that die and are buried in the human breast as loved friends are buried in a church-yard,—no towering monument of marble or granite marks where they lie; but there are surer, plainer signs imprinted in the living countenance of the one who carries such a tomb locked up within the breast that are just as readily discerned by the world in passing by. In such striking contrast to hers was the radiant and smiling countenance of her daughter that I

recalled, realizing their fitness, some lines I once read from "The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table" respecting this "terrible smile" as follows: "There are persons that no sooner come in sight of you than they begin to smile. It is evident that the consciousness of some imbecility or other is at the bottom of this extraordinary expression. I don't think, however, that these persons are commonly fools. I have known a number, and all of them were intelligent. I think nothing conveys the idea of under-breeding more than this self-betraying smile. The professor says there is a little fleshy slip called Santorini's laughing muscle. I would have it cut out of my face, if I were born with one of these constitutional grins upon it. It may be that they are born with these looks, as people are with more generally recognized deformities; but I would rather meet three scowlers than one of these smilers."

"I must stop her and tell her that I know of the cruel slander she has talked of me," said Irene to her husband, as they were about to meet this friend of her youth one day on the street.

"I would spare her that infliction, if I were you," he answered her. "I think she covers enough of suffering already underneath that mask of hers." And she had been content with passing her by without sign of recognition.

The Count Beaurynski is travelling about Europe, treasuring in his heart the remembrance of a fair young face, on whose owner he has silently and hopelessly lavished all the affection he is capable of feeling.

"I saw a beautiful flower like none I had ever seen before, growing by the wayside. I longed to gather it

to my bosom, and hold it there, so much I admired and loved it; but it was grafted on a homely stem,—I would not stoop to pluck it, and bruised it with my foot instead in passing. I have since travelled around the world, and gazed on many of the choicest, rarest, and most exquisite blossoms that have bloomed in many countries, but have seen nothing to compare with that one. I would now return, take up the wounded flower, and heal it with much cherishing if I might, but it is too late; another has done all that, and its fragrance and beauty are all for him alone," so did he answer his mother the last time she had besought him to marry; and with a gentle consideration for his sorrow, she never spoke again to him on the subject.

Mr. Wells remains abroad, still painting, and still in highest favor with all patrons of art. He often speaks with pride and kind remembrance of the success of his only pupil, "Norma."

Celia Frothingham is now in Paris with her husband; very happy, as she deserves to be. She received a letter from Irene not long since; it was postmarked New York, and while not very long, brought in its perusal much comfort and pleasure to her. It read,—

"My dear, kind, much-loved friend,—Rejoice with me! I have found the happiness that my soul has been hungering and thirsting after so long. He who was before my husband is again united with me in the bonds of marriage, strengthened now by truest love, and perfect understanding of each other. I know you will be able to realize something of my happiness in your own present experience; only mine must be even greater than yours, springing up, as it did, out of

an almost lifeless hope. I will tell you how it came about some time when we meet. I am more grateful to you than I am able to say, for your kindness to me during the time I was with you. May your friends be as considerate and faithful to you as you have been to me. May you find in your husband and home the same comfort and joy that I now experience in mine. My husband joins with me in thanking you for your tender and sisterly regard during the years of our close companionship.

"Your loving and devoted friend,

"IRENE."

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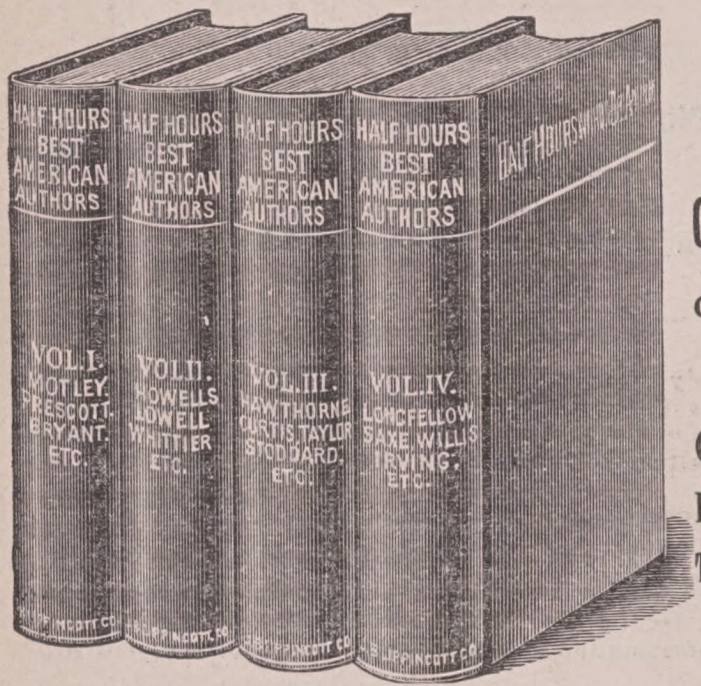
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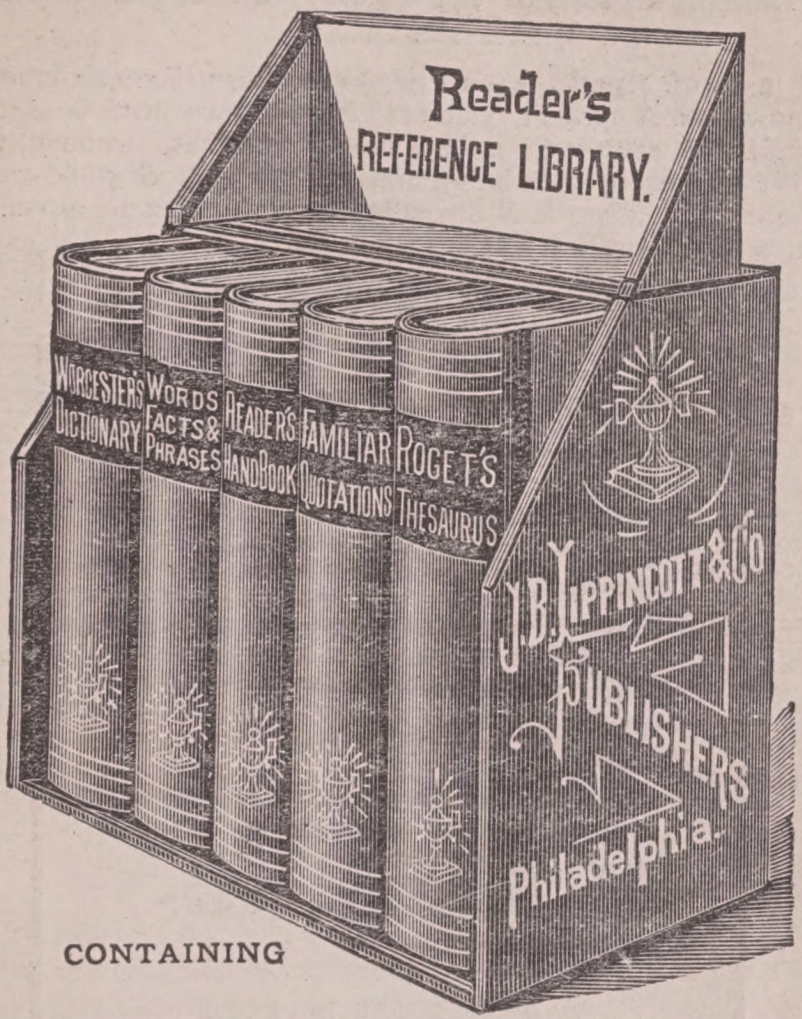

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